

PICTURES OF THINGS AND THINGS THAT ARE PICTURES

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NOTE TO THE READER

ACCOMPANYING THIS THESIS ARE DIGITAL VERSIONS OF PHOTOGRAPHS FROM TWO BODIES OF WORK DISCUSSED IN THE TEXT. ALSO INCLUDED ARE IMAGES THAT DOCUMENT AN EXHIBITION OF THE WORK FRAGMENTS, MONOLITHS, PORTALS. THIS GALLERY SHOW WAS PRODUCED AS PART OF THE EXAMINATION IN FEBRUARY 2014.

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THANK YOU TO ALL AT MMU WHO HAVE OFFERED FEEDBACK AND ADVICE WITH MAKING, THINKING AND WRITING.

THANKS TO MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS WHO HAVE ALWAYS BEEN SUPPORTIVE AND TO DANI FOR
HER KINDNESS, PATIENCE AND CONFIDENCE AT THE TIMES WHEN ALL MINE WAS GONE.

ABSTRACT

This project, encompassing a written thesis and final exhibition of work, traces the trajectory of my development as a photographic practitioner, following from an interest in creating photographs of objects. This practice has been brought into an artistic research framework and uses an open-ended methodology involving critical reflection on my processes in order to draw out a research question. I ask what and how a practice of making pictures of things – made prominent as things themselves – might contribute to an ongoing interrogation of the ontology of photography. The context for this question is a 'material turn' within photographic discourse, identified by Batchen (1997) and Edwards and Hart (2004), that suggests a shift from a concern with the textual to a concern with the objecthood of the photograph.

A detailed evaluation of my methodology encompasses technical and aesthetic considerations, examining the steps of my process – identified as *attention*, *creation*, *proto-production* and *resolute production* – in order to investigate and make explicit the specificities of my methods of making pictures. I emphasize these stages and inter-stages (periods of latency) as important components in the final outcome of the work, which aim to conceptually distance an appreciation of the constructed image from the original object.

The text argues that the thesis, together with the art works, constitutes a contribution to knowledge in the field of photography. It is specifically concerned with art practices that engage with a seeming paradox: that the photograph, while appearing to give relatively unmediated access to its referent, is also a catalyst for speculation whose very materiality is part of its affect on the viewer. I map the field with reference to historical and contemporary debates around the shifting identity of photography, locating critics

including, Bazin, Barthes, Snyder and Elkins, and I nominate as exemplars, prominent practitioners from Edward Weston to Hiroshi Sugimoto, Thomas Demand and Elad Lassry.

It is through the viewer's experience of an encounter with the exhibition of artworks that the research is finally realised. My photographic practice of making *Pictures of Things and Things that are Pictures* – defining 'things' through their indeterminacy – produces an analogue with the unsettled territory of photographic theory and the anxiety of the photograph as immaterial image/material artefact.

CONTENTS

PREFACE TO THESIS	2
INTRODUCTION	5
METHODOLOGY	14
LITERATURE REVIEW	38

A BREAKTHROUGH IMAGE: AN INDICATOR OF ILLUSION	65
PART ONE	
METAPHORS OF SHROUDING AND THE INTERPRETATION OF CODES	73
DISTURBING IMAGES AND THE SPACE OF THE PICTURE	84
CONSTRUCTIONS OF ENGAGEMENT	98
A SPECTRUM OF PRACTICES WITHIN THE FIELD	105
PART TWO	
AFFECTIVE PHOTOGRAPHY	119
PICTURES OF THINGS AND THINGS THAT ARE PICTURES	122
HOW TO FRAME A THING	132
CONCLUSION	142
BIBLIOGRAPHY	148

PREFACE TO THESIS

This research project originated through the realisation of a thematic connection between recurring features of my photographic practice and literary research around still life painting. My practice, drawn to making pictures of objects, related to this historical genre, but it was specifically engagement with Norman Bryson's *Looking at the Overlooked* (Bryson, 1990) that began a more rigorous investigation through my own work. Bryson suggests that:

[s]till life loves the "so what?" It exactly breaks with narrative's scale of human importance... still life pitches itself at a level of material existence where nothing exceptional occurs: there is wholesale eviction of the event (61).

The photograph involves the opening and closing of the shutter, this sectioning of space and time, no matter how short arguably constitutes the representation of a 'real' moment, regardless of the subject being an object, landscape or person. Writing about still life suggests there are also associations made between

making pictures of objects and the domestic space, most obviously through displays of food and scenes within the home. As a result the academic status of the genre is questioned and critically interrogated. Following its development as an autonomous practice in the 1600's (Lowenthal, 1996), still life is suggested to be at the bottom of a hierarchy of representation (Rowell, 1997). A chapter of Bryson's book titled *Rhopography*, a phrase taken from Charles Sterling's work on the subject¹ describes the objects in still life as lacking in importance, or as he says 'the unassuming material base of life that importance constantly overlooks' (Bryson, 1990:61). Rhopography is set up against Megalography the two categories being connected. Megalography is the depiction of greatness, portraits of Kings and Queens, or tableau painting of momentous historical events. Rhopography is the depiction of trivial things, those things concerned with a basic human existence and that which still life typically shows. Bryson articulates the connection between the two categories in the following way:

¹ Still Life Painting from Antiquity to the Present Time by Charles Sterling is a significant contribution to the field, presenting a two thousand year history of the evolution of the Still Life, remaining the only comprehensive overview available. See STERLING, C. 1981. *Still life painting : from antiquity to the twentieth century*, New York ; London, Harper & Row.

The concept of importance can arise only by separating itself from what it declares to be trivial and insignificant; 'importance' generates 'waste', what is sometimes called the preterite, that which is excluded or passed over' (Bryson, 1990:61).

By offering a look at the menial object, Bryson suggests still life steals attention from the subject, the human figure is not regarded and the narrative of greatness is ignored, there is no story for the viewer to follow and identify. Meaning becomes open-ended and ambiguous, imaginatively oscillating around images of unaccompanied things and the things as they might appear in reality.

It was this notion of a contention between what is considered important, what is un-important, as well the abandonment of narrative capacity that resonated with my own practice of working with everyday objects and helped to motivate this project.

Another reason still life was considered a low genre, was related to the fact that it was seen to be simply copying reality; a demonstration of technical skill rather

than artistic craft (Lowenthal, 1996:8). Still life is one such genre considered to have 'occupied the lowest ranks of importance' (Rowell, 1997:6) and partly because of its verisimilitude. The genre and those who practiced it were often seen as highly skilled craft-people but this did not necessarily constitute art. There is a connection here with a discourse that surrounds photography; that it could be thought to describe things too well to be art.

Although my research was initially motivated by themes identified as being related to my practice, the project presented here is not concerned with the field of still life, but rather one that uses a photographic practice of making pictures of objects to enhance understanding of the ontology of the photograph.

The identification of still life as *one* way to name my practice and the reading around the genre was the package that I brought into this research project but that has now been unwrapped and interrogated. Still life began as a good way to name what I do, that being making pictures of things. Still life is about the description of objects, it is about representation, this work does involve making pictures of objects and as photographic pictures, they cannot help but describe,

though they also do something else, something additional happens when these objects are photographed and it is this strange quality of the photograph that I aim to investigate.

INTRODUCTION

This project is concerned with a specific field of photographic art practice. This research field is one where artists engage with a playful exploitation of a seeming paradox of photography. It can be found in what might be considered quite varied types of photographic practice, all occupying the interstice of that paradox. The paradox in question is the ability of the photograph to be perceived as documentary evidence, while at the same time function as a catalyst for speculation and fantasy. Following identification of the field, the research question this project is concerned with is as follows:

How might a photographic practice of making pictures of objects engage with the debate surrounding the ontology of the photograph?

An iteration of the object photographed – or the thing in the picture – through the photographic object – the print itself – is proposed as a significant and specific feature of my practice that has enabled ontological speculation also marking the practice as an individual approach to research. The identification and

critical evaluation of 'double-coding' evident in the works made within my series *Fragments Monoliths, Portals*, as well as the artefacts themselves are marked here as a significant contribution to knowledge.

New knowledge produced by my research activity has been developed through an ongoing and specialist practical inquiry, and the dissemination of this contributes to the academic understanding of photographic art practice itself. This is not restricted to the production of knowledge only in relation to this project, its themes and the body of research material produced. Jan Baetens suggests that

photographic discourse should make room for research by artists

(...) as a theoretical practice that does not simply increase personal

skill but also produces intersubjective knowledge (Baetens, 2007:66).

Here, it is expected that the project and its conclusions be broadly useful to any critical engagement with photographic practices that engage with objects.

Artistic research typically refers to academic research projects which rigorously engage with art practices, where processes and products function as the research

- that is, they embody the production of new knowledge through their existence, or processes of coming into being – and are also normally accompanied by a piece of writing, contextualising, critically interrogating and reflexively articulating the knowledge of and within those practices. In this research, the photographs and associated work I make, the reading I engage with and the writing I produce are considered collectively as the research practice. Each has not operated in isolation but is progressively and cumulatively informed and developed by the other. The literature on the variously termed versions of artistic research - practice-led, practice-as, practice-by, through practice – is similarly broad and heterogeneous, though throughout, there is an agreement that visual art and writing should function symbiotically. In a paper reflecting on her own PhD's focus on an engagement between making sculpture and philosophy, Siún Hanrahan presents a resonant approach to the relationship. She states 'my research [...] was approached through engaging art-making and philosophy in a dialogue. As used by David Bohm, "dialogue" suggests a stream of meaning flowing through and between the participants. Thus, I sought to have a stream of meaning flow through and between art-making and philosophy' (Hanrahan, 1998:29). The notion of meaning is interesting here. As an artist engaging with

research through my practice, a question that is frequently returned to is: what does the work mean? – It may be thought that established philosophy or theory could help to explain, though having completed this project, it is more so that the meaning of a work functions to propose more questions and in turn provide the impetus to make more work.

Artistic Research as discussed through the book *The Artistic Turn: A Manifesto* (Coessens et al., 2009) has been instrumental in the development of a method with which to approach this project and the position that practice has taken in regard to established theory and the writing produced. It is therefore important to state that the methodology used for this research activity has remained open-ended until the project reached its conclusion. I have produced writing alongside making photographs of objects, some of which has made it to this final written document and some of which has functioned to help think through the work and produce the final research question. Similarly there has been practice which has assisted in testing the relevance of conceptual ideas, but does not feature as final work. This fluid version of research methodology aligns with what Coessens et al. describe as 'the metaphor of the ship' (101). The metaphor describes a ship

sailing out on a journey with a purposeful trajectory, towards a known end point.

The journey is always unique, as once the ship departs land the shifting topography of the sea requires constant adjustments to compensate for changes in the mapped territory, which are not possible to anticipate. As the authors suggest,

[a]ll knowledge and all explanations are the result of ongoing, incessant, dynamic experiences; artistic knowledge foregrounds those experiences as intrinsic to it, rather than simply the means to an end (102).

Artistic research is therefore as much about a critical discussion of processes of production, methods, conceptualisation, turning points and realisations brought about by the journey, as opposed to limiting the discussion to what is found at the end of the journey.

In light of this, following this introduction is a methodology section. Titled PRE-to-POST, this seeks to make explicit the actions and thought processes I have

used when making pictures. The process began intuitively, reacting instinctively as a product of a personal experience of practice. Gradually the process has become formalised in an attempt to focus on important details of process, which might ordinarily become consumed by the making of an art object.

PRE refers to the events and actions leading up to the release of the shutter, and POST refers to those taking place after the release of the shutter. The significance of this simple terminology seeks to make clear how events beyond the specific photographic act might affect how the viewer engages with the final photograph. Thus the agency of the work is active beyond what is in front of the camera. I reflect upon a series of inter-stages between the pre, the post and the photographic itself, the definition and nature of which address the final photograph as a picture of an uncertain object, that engages with the identified paradox and the unstable theoretical territory that persists within criticism. The referent as a stable object, that was once before the camera, becoming the thing referred to by the photograph, is re-considered as a symbolic condensation of the events leading to the making of the picture, whilst also shrouding the narrative of those events. The making of the final print is examined as part of

post-photographic action and positions this activity as an object making practice as well as an imaging practice.

As part of the methodology and in evaluation of the description of my methods a section of writing seeks to make connections between the frame of the photograph; it's cutting out of the external world, and the characteristics of my own practice, which began as being domestically orientated with my intentions being to shroud this location and theme. The practice is proposed as being *internal*. This categorisation is a means to conceptually connect the activity of my practice; being in the home with the world produced by these pictures of things; within the frame, as well as the meaning of a work; there being a lack of explicit communication of narrative. The *internal* is private, it is closed off, it is non-communicative, it is uncertain and ambiguous and marks itself against the documentary tradition of photography, seen to be associated with what is going on externally, a narrative of events. The work thus seeks to present what is not considered important and a problem is hypothesised about how a direct focus on the ordinary transforms it, making it extra-ordinary. Photography is often considered a process capable of making an objective copy of a scene; for

example when used in a court of law it is considered as such. Though, through its apparent neutrality, it also obscures the photograph's function as document, its transparent view inviting the viewer's potential imaginative speculation of the image. The singularity of the perceptual experience it seemingly presents is in fact a product of ideology. The photograph as used in this project, is thus proposed as an appropriate practice for looking at the simplicity of things, as it is able to protect that simplicity. Having inadvertently followed a line of artists and writers similarly interested in the ordinary. I introduce the concept of *the intra-ordinary* (inside the ordinary) as a means of photographically looking at the surface of things to overcome the problem.

A literature review titled *Simple Pictures: The Thing Itself (but also something else)* follows the methodology and is used to examine the literature related to the unresolved theorisation of photography's 'realistic tendency' (Kracauer, 1960:18). One philosophical approach is that the material aspect of the photograph is rendered effectively transparent, the photograph being considered a metaphorical window, which the viewer is able to see through and bring back a particular space and time for consideration. This is the theory of transparency, articulated by

the philosopher Kendall Walton and positions the photograph as a realistic representational space (Walton, 2008). Seeing through the photograph in this way aligns with the theorisation of the photograph as an indexical sign. Rosalind Krauss' two part, *Notes on the Index* (Krauss, 1985) brings to photography criticism, Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of semiotics, which articulates '[a]n index is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes (...) In so far as the Index is affected by the Object' (Peirce and Buchler, 1940:102). The photograph is considered an indexical sign as it is produced through the recording of light reflected from the original object, or what is also called the referent (that which is referred to by the sign). The photograph as indexical sign, a trace of light, thus sets up a perception of the photograph as a "natural" illusion of the real. The notion of transparency and the photograph as an indexical sign is a focus on what the photograph shows, it is a "pointing to" the real world, what Roland Barthes calls the denotative image. The denotative is a pure conception of photography, one that exists hypothetically outside of culture; what Barthes calls 'a message without a code' (Barthes, 1977a:17). Barthes' connotative image considers the cultural connotation of what the photograph points to. The viewer or reader of the text of the image is said to bring language to the image, and

meaning is constructed through that reading. The post-structuralist thesis mobilises this intertextuality (Burgin, 1986) and the photograph as representation of the real is complicated through the assertion that the referent is dependent upon language and culture, therefore disputing the status of the photograph as any essentialist document of the real.

The post-modern focus on a multiplicity of meaning and concern for the subject matter of the image as well as the viewing subject as the location of that meaning has been more recently subject to critical re-evaluation. A "material turn" is articulated as attention to the object of photography; the picture as thing, that the post-modern scholars of photography discourse are argued to have largely disregarded. Following the incorporation of digital technology into photographic practice and the anxiety surrounding its potential transformation of physical notions of the medium, the poignancy of the print is brought to attention, as Sabine Kriebel suggests 'the photograph emerges as something that we not only look through but also look at' (Kriebel, 2007:43).

There are two coherent bodies of work made within this project. *Outside of the*

Walls is a series of colour photographs of rocks and similar objects on grey and blue paper backgrounds. This was the first body of work to be realised, and as discussed in the methodology, reflection on my aims and intentions for these images have been important in formulating the parameters of the project and the research question itself. The photographic series *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals* has emerged from this research as the final piece in the project. The work features singular objects or simple constructions of objects intended to be considered singularly. Each of these is located centrally in the photographic frame and is surrounded by a dark (mostly black or grey) environment. There are no other objects visible in the framed space; there is the object and the background only. There are also different backgrounds as well as different objects, some of these are cove type backgrounds, which are smooth and seamless, some are more creased and folded and then there are backgrounds that have a divide between background and the ground, creating something comparable to a horizon behind the object. These pictures are all monochromatic and printed on a smooth, matt finished, cotton rag paper stock, at a size of 16" x 20" (inches).

Following the discussion of *a breakthrough image*, one which draws together the

concepts brought about by the practice, part one of the thesis considers examples of photographs made within the two series and aims to place these within a context of photographic art that is argued to be part of a spectrum of engagement with the identified paradox. In these works, properties of the graspable real – the world in which the viewer is located – are not precisely determinable, judgments of the size of objects, how to name something, an ambiguity of surface, the texture of an object, determination of the representation of light and shadow as well as the spatial positioning of an object become ambiguous and uncertain. It is suggested the viewer constructs an interpretation of the object in the picture located in a virtual or imaginary space, that they also know to be a representation of the real. The codes, style or design of the images are discussed in terms of how they might produce meaning for the viewer. Discussions of the pictures made within *Fragments*, *Monoliths*, *Portals* reveal some of the origins of objects; some of these are also personally subjective readings and are considered here to feed back into practice for the development of the work and expansion of the series.

Part two introduces a theory of affect, as well as recent considerations of the

"material turn". These are proposed as an addition to linguistic models of photographic criticism, placing emphasis on the photograph as a 'performative' as well as material artefact. In relation to affect, a reconsideration of Ariella Azoulay's use of the term, is argued to invest the photograph with agency (Azoulay, 2008). Bill Brown's *thing theory* (Brown, 2009), is then deployed, through which my practice is considered as one which presents pictures of 'things' reiterated through the photograph as an object also being considered as a 'thing' itself.

Closing the thesis is a discussion of the framing practices utilised to exhibit *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals*. The concepts dictating the design of the frames respond to the conclusions drawn in this thesis and aim to embody these through the viewer's engagement with the work.

METHODOLOGY

PRE-TO-POST

Much of the practical work involved in the making of final pieces, aside from functioning as experimental and investigative practice, has involved using found and collected objects. The first series *Outside of the Walls* is a collection of pictures of rocks. The narrative of production when finding a rock, making a picture of it, and then looking at the object as an image is not simply a linear technical process but also incorporates the passage of time as part of the transformation between an object, an image of that object and then that image as printed artefact. For example, when finding bits of rock and beginning to consider how they may come to be used in a picture, I do not immediately make a decision about how it will be photographed, neither do I plan out its progression as a piece, working up to a final image installed on the gallery wall. Such pre-planning might account for the size of the printed image, the quality and type of paper required to make a print, or whether it would be a print at all. Also the work could possibly become a projection or presentation on screen, or some other more elaborate method of presentation. I do not plan what any of

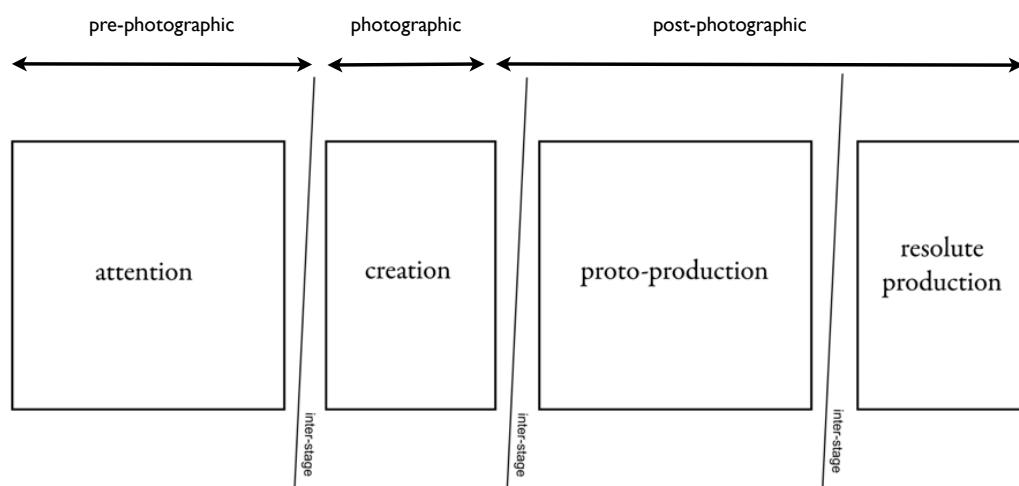
these decisions might mean or consider how they may be significant to the viewer.

In a general sense the separate but overlapping stages of production can be identified as:

1. The pre-photographic: actions and events taking place before the shutter is released (the event of the photograph)
2. The photographic: actions and events taking place during the event of the photograph
3. The post-photographic: actions and events taking place after the event of the photograph

These stages are likely to be applicable to any type of photographic picture making, as there are always the moments of consideration before the shutter is released and the image also needs to be viewed and organised in some way following the photographic event. Beyond these straightforward distinctions, other more discreet stages and inter-stages of production are identified and these have

been rationalised as a product of reflection on my own methods and stages of making pictures. The following diagram indicates and identifies these stages and inter-stages:



Attention

The initial stage of 'attention' relates to the events, actions and considerations, which contribute to the making of a picture, occurring before what might be more generally considered the event of production, which is the setting up of an arrangement to be photographed and the photographic event itself. The first thing to consider here is an attention to the world as a product of involvement in

a specific project². Attention comes to be articulated by the characteristics defining the boundaries of the work being made; in this case, attention is to objects deemed appropriate and useful for making certain types of pictures. The appropriateness of one object over another has shifted as my work has developed conceptually and the selection of objects is discussed where different pictures and bodies of work are considered individually. Attention involves looking for and finding things, whether it is in my home, at work, on a routine walk or journey. The definition of a found object by WJT Mitchell provides a useful starting point:

(1) It must be ordinary, unimportant, neglected and (until its finding) overlooked; it cannot be beautiful, sublime wonderful, astonishing, or remarkable in any obvious way or it would have already been singled out, and therefore would not be a good candidate for "finding". And (2) it's finding must be accidental,

² An earlier conception of attention to the world that this project engages with was produced in July 2011 for the *State of Play* exhibition held at Cube Gallery, Manchester. This is illustrated in a document titled attention -> ownership, which can be found in its entirety at <http://attention-ownership.tumblr.com/>. The text, although in places divergent from the final position of the practice, indicates many of the intuitive notions that have been rationalised through critical engagement.

not deliberate and planned. One does not seek the found object, as Picasso famously remarked. One *finds* it... The secret of the found object is thus the most intractable kind: it is hidden in plain sight (Mitchell, 2005:114).

Mitchell's description of the found object partly resonates with my own finding/collecting practices, though through my own experiences I would argue that the intentional or accidental finding of things for use or display in art practice is not so definite.

In the summer of 2011 an object was found, a picture was made and I produced a text reflecting upon the event:

The object in question is a section of a fabricated stone bollard or block weight used for constructing and securing temporary metal fencing. These are often found around building sites or used at public events to control the movement of crowds, I have since come to learn these are called Heras fencing blocks. This particular block was found whilst walking to the supermarket from my home. My

attention was drawn to the object due to the fact that it was broken; for some reason it had become split into two pieces across the point where a length of fencing would slot into the block. I can imagine that, as a result, the bollard could not perform its intended function and had become moved onto the pavement, leaving a section of fencing unsupported and sagging. It seemed out of place and this is perhaps one of the reasons my attention was drawn to it. I picked it up, took it home and eventually made a picture of it. This process of finding things to make pictures of is a relevant discussion of my practice, but it is also important to think about the level to which I might have been looking for this type of object, there may well have been lots of objects that for any number of reasons seemed out of place, but these were not photographed. It is not completely accurate to say I was looking for this object; the purpose of my activity at that moment was to walk to the supermarket and not to find something to photograph. It would be more suitable to think of finding this thing as a product of a premeditated practice that engages with the interaction between certain objects and my everyday activities. Objects tend to have almost invisible or unnoticed functions when fully operational and it is only through their failure or removal from use that they gain attention. There are places to 'look' for these sorts of things: skips,

alleyways, the edges of building sites, but these locations are only noticed as a part of everyday activities and are not specifically sought out.

The engagement with a practice of making pictures creates a specifically tuned attention to my everyday environment. To a certain degree this is indirectly taking place all the time, though it is not fully conscious or intentional – yet, there is a point where I become aware of my attention. I might find that my gaze is cast across piles of discarded stones or rubble, or that I am looking into the driveways of houses that are being refurbished for things moved out of the spaces they have occupied, into a space between their previous function and their position as waste. The event of a thing coming to my attention marks a point where I internally declare “this can be used to make a picture”, and the object has the potential to be made into a picture.

I suggest that this statement from my own experience of finding objects problematises the notion of this object being a typical ‘found object’, but the notion of attention to such things that I have put forward in turn questions the definition of the found object. A true found object in the terms of Mitchell’s

definition should be something stumbled upon, as he says it is something hidden in plain sight, it cannot be looked for. The argument is that in my own case although objects are not actively looked for I always have an attention to a potential object, which is brought about through a consistent tuning to the parameters of the project. Such attention is always present and developed through a personal history of practice. Whether carrying a camera or not, a street photographer has attention to compositions for pictures, which present themselves in the flux of the urban space in much the same way that a skateboarder has attention to the architecture of a city for its potential to ride through, over and across, even if the skateboarder is simply walking across the city. This is a learnt and consequently embedded knowledge, progressively nurtured from a personal history of practice and is not only about identification with a specific everyday moment to an existing knowledge of practice, but is also the cognitive playing through of the possibilities of interaction in the terms of ones practice. When finding an object that has the potential for a picture I am already considering it as a picture rather than an object. My perspective on photography as a generative device rather than a representational device – a theme which will be unfolded throughout this thesis– contributes to the

specificity of the playing through of my potential use of the object. I am not thinking about how the object can be documented, but rather how its picture might appear and thus how the object will eventually be considered through its picture.

The finding of the found object is not quite accidental or intentional, but is the product of an unconscious attention to the world, somewhere between found and sought out. Some of the rocks used for *Outside of the Walls* were "found" whilst digging, as I was undertaking gardening at my home. Although I was not specifically carrying out this activity to look for things to take pictures of, I was aware that I may find some rocks and they might be useful to the project. I think that this sort of activity marks a second level of found object, which is beyond Mitchell's definition. This sort of found object is a development through an interaction between an artist's everyday activity and their art practice, the two frequently blurring together. Through a connection with one's own practice, the individual functions as a tuning fork for the external components that form the practice, a passive resonance searching for a natural frequency of vibration.

1st Inter-stage

Once an object has been found and collected it is brought home and often left in the house on a shelf or windowsill until it is used for a picture. Waiting as a latent object is significant as the object has further attention paid to it as it comes to occupy a particular space in the home, being located between usefulness and ornament. The object is, in fact, neither of these descriptions as it is not intended for display in the home, nor is it performing some sort of domestic task. Its function is to wait and to be quietly considered as I move past it and engage with my everyday domestic activities. In the process of waiting, objects become separated from the environment in which they were found (the external), and they move towards the de-contextualised photographic space (the internal) that they will, at some point, assume. This initial inter-stage is part of the preparation for the photograph to be made, allowing time for an idea of an image of how the object will look in the photograph to begin to form. It is difficult to define specifically what it is that determines the picture of an object is ready to be made. The exploratory research process has tended to function cumulatively, so it is likely that an additional picture will be made when required, creating further material to help develop the project. Literary research involves reading existing

material, processing that material through making notes and thinking about what it suggests and then synthesising an articulation of that material. The same is true of this practically located research. Photographs are made and incorporated (along with a knowledge of the experience of their making) as research material and thus making a new picture might be compared to reading a new book.

Creation

This refers to the event of making the photograph. My work is most often made within the home and begins with setting up a space on which to construct the environment in which an object will be placed and photographed. A tabletop is often used, as it provides a flat surface on which paper or fabric can be placed to act as the background for the picture. There are two variations of the formats for the construction of the background. Firstly a cove-type background, which involves using a single sheet of material curving between a horizontal and vertical surface, which acts as both the ground and the background of the picture. Or alternatively two separate sheets of material are used which creates a division between ground and background. The point of picking up the object to place it on the tabletop – which involves feeling its weight, shape and texture – begins a

negotiation between the imagined potential images (considered at the previous inter-stage) and the playing out of the making of the picture. I do not strive to make the imagined picture, but simply to recognise the difference between this, how it looks on the table, and how it looks when viewed through the camera.

This process involves a negotiation of the technical and aesthetic possibilities of the potential picture; taking into account the framing of the object, the height of position from which it is viewed, the direction of lighting of the object, the type or quality of light used (direct or diffuse for example) and the specific position of the object. There are a number of constants to my photographic process: A large format, 5x4 camera attached to a tripod has been used throughout the research process. The camera allows a single sheet of film to be exposed, which is individually loaded into the camera, following from the composition of the image; Large format cameras are often used by photographers to produce a larger negative and, therefore, a higher quality image. Although a high quality image is important to my process, a medium format film camera would provide adequate quality at the size the final image is printed. There is also the option to use a medium format digital camera, which would provide more than enough resolution of image for my requirements. Both options have been used to test

out and experiment with different methods of production but I have always returned to the large format 5x4 inch camera to make pictures. The artist Jem Southam uses a large format camera to make landscape photographs, articulating that he does so as he enjoys that the large format camera provides an opportunity to see the world in a way that can't be done any other way³. The image is viewed upside-down projected through the camera, onto a sheet of ground glass at the back of the camera. In order to view this image the camera must be used with a darkcloth covering the head and the back of the camera and, as a result, through these unusual actions there is a dislocation from a normal viewing of the world. The inverted and enclosed viewing experience is one that is not readily activated using either an analogue or digital camera fitted with a viewfinder that is held up to the eye. The image projected through the large format camera is looked at with both eyes, so when making the picture the framed world of the image is experienced as the world is without mediation, but the framing and inverted image makes this a unique and strange experience. The method is also much slower to use than other photographic equipment and such an approach allows time for consideration of the making of the picture. I will also

³ Citation taken from personal notes from an artist talk at Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, Carlisle 10th February 2010.

tend to make only one exposure for each object. This began as an instinctive approach and a characteristic of my practice, but in reflection making only one picture of each thing avoids what I see as an impulse to document prevalent in a particular ideology of photography. Multiple images of events or actions taken from different angles and at different moments, provide a photographic document closer to the experience of the viewer being present themselves, allowing a cumulative subjective impression of what is seen as objective record.

Making only one image functions to control my experience of the original object, it is a negotiation of the transformation into the image of the object I imagine through contemplation. This process enables a visual experience of the object through its picture rather than itself. The slow and meticulous approach means I am confident that the picture will be exposed correctly and there is no need to make more than one image to allow for possible errors in exposure calculations. The significance of a single exposure in this process of making pictures means the image, in my own mind, has come to replace the object. A careful negotiation of the arrangement of the object in relation to space around it becomes an essential part of the working process. The subtle angle of the camera and the lighting is

adjusted, which is moved back and forth, tweaking and teasing slight variations in angles until I feel that the picture is ready to be made. When ready, the film is carefully loaded into the camera and the exposure is made.

2nd Inter-stage

The specific use of analogue film is relevant to this inter-stage of production. If I were using digital technology the image produced would be available to view immediately and not only could I be tempted to make a second or third image if, for any reason, the first was thought to be not correct, but more significantly a gestation period for the image would not be possible. The use of film and the deliberate emphasis of a period of latency provide spaciousness, allowing time between viewing the original object and viewing its potential picture. This could be likened to a metamorphosis through mediation; the image is lying dormant, between original object and not quite formed picture. Once photographed the object is thrown out, or packed away out of sight in order to de-activate its potency as original object and allows the image as picture to take its place. If the image were to be viewed immediately then it would be my perceptual proximity to the original object, which might tempt me to make another picture. When

viewed days or weeks later the original experience is obscured, my memory of the object is not definite and there is an opening opportunity for the object as new picture. The practice is set up in such a way to tend towards forgetting the object rather than remembering it as it would be perceived without being photographed. Instead, what is remembered through the picture that is made is the experience of finding the object, the contemplation of it as a picture and how the potential picture might be interpreted.

Proto-production

This section refers to the stage of production first bringing the image into existence. Proto- is used as a prefix to differentiate from subsequent stages of production of the picture, which resolve the image to a more finely crafted and specifically printed object. Proto-production begins with the development of the negative. I have used both black & white and colour processes in the research. Colour images are processed with a standardised process, with little potential to control how the image looks through its development. When using black & white film, although there is lots of potential to control the distribution of the tonal range in the image and it's contrast, the negative is processed with no deliberate

adjustment. I am not interested in adjusting the appearance of the image at this stage, as any adjustment carried out would be based on my experience of photographing the object and how it looked at this point. The developing of the film marks my first experience of the object as picture and it is always a strange experience. There is an abrupt and instant change in my knowledge of the object and the image I have of it. Until this point my knowledge of the framed space has been constructed from the object I have arranged on a tabletop, seen upside-down and laterally inverted. Though this object has long since been neutral to me, it is now a vehicle of potential imagery, a product of an intuitive attention and imaginative investment. My viewing of the negative moves on this knowledge and offers the first solidified experience of what I will call the invented image; that which is not only a document of the object, but in addition a realisation of the pre-visualised image that began to be constructed when I first found the object. The image as negative is not as it will appear in its final form; colour and tone is inverted, but the experience of the image does offer a first insight into the composition of the image. The distribution of any shadow detail is visible (as well as the hardness or softness of any shadow), as is the acceptable sharpness of the image, and the relationship between the object and the space which surrounds it.

Following the processing, negatives are digitally scanned at the highest resolution possible. Scanning usually takes place as soon as is possible following development of the latent image. This is considered a technical step, digitising the analogue negative. The process involves scanning without any adjustments, and only capturing the pictorial information held on the negative as a digital file.

I initially decided to use a digital rather than analogue printed output as the digital process allows a greater potential for post-photographic processing at later stages and enables the photograph to be more than only document. The use of a digital output also enables the use of print material that is traditionally non-photographic. Papers which are traditionally associated with print-making, drawing and watercolour painting can be used with digital inkjet printing, helping to distance the work from the 'photographic' and an association with the photograph as only representational document. Following scanning, the files are edited using Photoshop®. The editing process involves inverting the negative image to make it positive and each image is then individually produced, the specifics of which are determined as I come to get to know the object in its new form. Working with the image on screen enables a degree of active creative production; this is also possible using an analogue darkroom print, though the

increased mutability of the digital file is more appropriate at this proto stage. At this point the picture does not quite seem to be created yet, it is still taking shape, it is in a stage between object and picture. I will tend to work on editing a particular image in one sitting. As with the actual photographing of the object, this process involves a gradual adjustment of the image, I am not trying to achieve a resemblance to the original scene photographed and it can be quite an open-ended process. Importantly I am in no way seeking to radically change the appearance of the photographed object through digital manipulation. For example, by changing its size or adding another part to it that was not present when the photograph was made, though I do adjust the colour or the tone of the image or the density of shadow to control how that object appears as a product of photographic mediation. As changes are made I will save the image over the previous file. Conceptually this erasure of the image's previous manifestation aims to distance the potential picture from the object that has been photographed. What is activated instead is the picture as a representation of a potentially different object, one that is symbolic of my everyday experiences of it and one that embodies the fantasy I construct for the object.

3rd Inter-stage

Following the editing process, a low quality test print is made on A3 paper. The purpose of this print is to produce the first physical print of the picture, which, in the same way as the original found object, is lived with at the fringes of daily activity. By having the print on a wall at home, or on desk I might be working at, I come to know the object as image through the print, looking within the image for the object I have imagined. Over time the picture comes to replace my knowledge of the original object through the specific relationship with the space that appears in the picture. The image of the object that comes from my original finding of the object, and my handling of it when making it's picture, begins its confirmation through this new inventive image. The significance of my own distancing from the original object is only applicable to me. Subsequent viewers of the work do not have knowledge of the original object and the only possible knowledge comes through interaction with the picture. The implicit transformation through photographic mediation is still relevant to the concepts of the work; a viewer cannot know this object in any other form than the picture presents, but at the same time they are aware it is a photograph and the object is or was a real object at some point.

Resolute Production

The final print is produced following an initial edit and test printing at proto-production. Again a short period of time is left, usually around a month before this next stage of production begins. My experience of the digital image on screen and its manifestation at resolute production as a print needs to be carefully negotiated. Depending on the image and the type of paper it will be printed on, the process requires decision-making, which affects the aesthetic appearance of the picture and how the viewer perceives it. In the same way that the release of the shutter is considered as bringing a picture into existence, I consider this stage of production on the same level. Printing is not simply a technical task but an additional stage of production dictating the specific output of a picture as the translation is made from:

OBJECT TO BE PHOTOGRAPHED -> LATENT IMAGE -> DEVELOPED NEGATIVE -> SCANNED

NEGATIVE (DIGITISED IMAGE) -> TEST PRINT -> FINAL PRINT

A consistent approach when making final prints is to make digital test-strip prints

to examine specific areas of detail and areas where highlight and shadow meet.

From the beginning of this project I have known intuitively that the printed image would be important as the final output of the work and the means for the viewer to experience the picture. I have felt it significant that the materiality of the printed image refers back to the materiality of the object that was photographed more so than the projected or screen based image is capable. The physical surface of the print, in which the image is permanently contained within or applied to the surface of a paper, is considered to be an essential component of the viewer's engagement with an object through its picture. The presence of a potentially tactile surface offers the viewer a visual sense of the possibility of physical engagement and visual scrutiny not possible with an on-screen or projected image. It is the photograph's ability to make the three-dimensional appear two dimensional, whilst providing a significant enough illusion of depth to imagine the physical dimensionality of the object.

Through the making of this photographic work I would consider there to be a number of phases of output and consequent experiences of the object as a picture and leading to the final work.

1 – IMAGE ON SCREEN -> **IMAGE** ->

2 – IMAGE AS TEST PRINT -> **PRINT** ->

3 – IMAGE AS FINAL PRINT -> **PICTURE** ->

4 – INSTALLATION IN THE GALLERY SPACE -> **FINAL WORK**

Each of these generations of the photographic conceptually moves the image on, each phase producing a new perceptual experience for the viewer. The image on screen is both weightless as a layer of pixels, whilst also taking on the body of the device it is shown on; the screen or monitor itself. The image as test print does not feel sufficiently resolved to take on a sense of the physical. The low quality, poor resolution of image and cheap paper, has a disposable feel to it; it is unlikely to last and has no permanency as object. The final resolved print made on a premium quality archival paper (traditionally fine art printmaking media) using archival inks, begins to cement the image as a permanent and physical object, this quality and permanency is visually evident on the surface of the picture. And the final generation of image, framed and installed, encases the object, presenting and protecting the object, whilst also providing a barrier

preventing the possibility of touching the image as printed object.

In summary, my 'pre-photographic' actions as an artist using photography involve finding, or having an attention for objects (developed from a personal history of practice), which might be useful for my project. This usefulness is determined by realising an intuitive and imaginative potential for the "found" object and how it might be perceived in the picture as something other than itself. The process of making the picture after an object is deemed useful is not immediate. The object is brought into the home, which is seen as a site for imaginative potential. The object is lived with and over time I begin to imaginatively play-out its possibilities as a picture. When the picture is made as part of the 'photographic' stage, the process is similarly extended by using a plate camera. This requires precise and detailed adjustments, slowing down the photographic process. In addition the use of this camera enables a viewing of the framed image, which is relatively (to other analogue and digital cameras) direct and uninterrupted (light passing through a lens, through a box and onto a ground, glass screen), whilst also inverting it, making it appear different to the way the world is perceived through vision. Only a single image of each object is made as part of a process that seeks to gradually

create space, or distance between the original object and its new status as a representation in a picture. As an extension of this process there is deliberate delay in processing the negative, again looking to distance the image from the object. Beginning the 'post-photographic' the processed negative is digitally scanned and edited using computer software with previous versions of the edited image not being saved; each version is saved over the last. This is identified as an erasure of evidence, where the photograph is perceived to be a copy of the original object. The image is printed on low quality photocopy paper and similarly "lived with" as the object was in the 'pre-photographic' stage. This is a process of coming to know the object as an image and through the print; looking within the image for the object I have imagined. Eventually, a final, resolved image is made as a digital print on cotton rag paper.

The final print is also framed and presented in a particular way, though the details of this installation will be considered at the end of the thesis following a discussion of images and concepts, which came later in the narrative of the project and contributed to the framing methods used.

A NOTE ON THE SELECTION AND ORGANISATION OF OBJECTS

Each of the objects photographed for *Outside of the Walls* was collected from the front or back garden of my house, dug from the ground or collected on short walks within the vicinity of my home. They are not displayed with any additional text or individual name (other than the overarching series title). My intention for each of these works was to construct a photographic environment, which isolated and de-contextualised the object giving no indication of the humble origin of each rock. Not only was I bringing the outside inside to make pictures, I was also making pictures in my home. Therefore it was not just the domestically located specimens that were being brought inside, it was my practice as a whole. I conceived of this as an internalised practice that was not concerned with the outside world and surmised that the privacy of the home also mirrored the protection or privacy bestowed upon the object that the agency of the photograph provided. In addition the still life table had been simplified from the more formal still life studio, to the walls and table surfaces of my own home. Yet, the chosen framing of the camera and the use of a paper background protected this entire environmental context. For anyone looking at the image, the location

beyond the frame was not evident. Importantly, since the activity and presence of my practice was out of any public realm, as the maker of the work I felt I could have more control over the interpretation or lack of it in the pictures I was producing. Through this process my notion was that the objects I photographed had potential to be meaningful in a manner beyond what would be expected from the unremarkable things they actually were. This conceptual realisation for the practice was doubly interesting as it was not only the vulnerability of the objects being protected by the photograph, but it was also the practice itself. Following from William Clancey's notion of situatedness⁴, as an account for the importance of the location of practice, not just its product, making work in the home functions to de-professionalise the traditional studio based practice of still life or product photography and the masking of this becomes significant for the meaning of the practice as a whole. Working with objects and emulating a studio environment, whilst being located in the domestic space lacks the professionalism of photographing an object for a specific purpose. Richon writes that the employee photographer is 'incorporated like a mechanical part in a mechanical

⁴ Situatedness is defined by William Clancey as 'Where you are when you do what you do matters', and stresses the importance of attention to the specific space where work is made – see COESSENS, K., CRISPIN, D. & DOUGLAS, A. 2009. *The Artistic Turn - A Manifesto*, Ghent, Orpheus Instituut. pp65-74.

system... his activity loses its active character to become contemplative' (Richon et al., 2006:12). Outside this professional system, contemplation, being an opportunity to look and to think through, enables uncertainty and ambiguity of what is being looked at. The photographic studio is also a space that is built from nothing each time it is used for a shoot. It is like a blank canvas, where scenery, props, models and objects are brought in and arranged, lit and photographed. Following a shoot, the illusion is dismantled, returning the studio to an empty space. Working at home has allowed me to have my things around me. The objects I photograph, or am waiting to photograph, backgrounds and other artworks surround me, informing the process of making each picture. Home as a personal space becomes a site for me to have imaginative investment in these objects. The space is more like that of the traditional painting studio than the traditional photography studio – it is lived in, the work taking its form through ideas surrounding the object.

THE INTRA-ORDINARY

The development and gradual realisation of my localised practice can be

associated with established ideas of 'The Everyday', relating to what is now considered a contemporary canon of art practice that seeks out everyday life and commonplace activities or objects as a source for artistic inspiration, or subject for investigation. Stephen Johnstone states,

[s]ince the mid-1990s numerous international biennales, site-specific projects, historical overviews of modernism and themed group exhibitions have attested to the widespread appeal of the quotidian to curators and artists alike (2008:12).

The accompanying footnote to the text above lists more than twenty international exhibitions taking place in the last two decades, all attributing the Everyday to their shared curatorial concerns. This extensive overview and a review of the works presented in these shows illustrates the degree to which "The Everyday" has infiltrated art practice in opposition to the extraordinary and the virtuosic, instead valuing the ordinary. Similarly, in relation to the widespread use of "found objects", W.J.T. Mitchell writes that,

the display of junk, garbage, obsolete technologies, and other waste products has virtually become a genre in the exhibition spaces of contemporary art (Mitchell, 2005:111).

A potential problem with looking at the everyday through the lens of contemporary art is that which makes it everyday and ordinary becomes a spectacle. It is privileged through attention and paradoxically loses its original and self-defining 'everyday' specificity. In consideration of this problem and in line with the development of my own practice, I was drawn to deal with an art object or set of practices that could be considered everyday. I wondered what the parameters of the ordinary were and when the ordinary might cease to be so; when the ordinary might shift to a realm *beyond* ordinariness. By definition the ordinary is not to be considered as though it is anything special; there is nothing exceptional about it. It has no features that are distinctive, of interest or out of the ordinary. Yet perhaps it is specifically within that lack of distinction that value should be found, but paying attention to that value also erases mere ordinariness. There is a general nonchalance towards the ordinary, it is easily dismissed, and it is possible that something important may have been missed, for having never

looked for it in the first place.

The extraordinary insists on consideration, it goes beyond the very daily occurrence of walking past an overlooked lump of stone, nestled amongst the dirt in a front garden; this being the event that initiated the photographs in *Outside of the Walls*. Each of these images use single objects in a constructed empty space and allows for a durational and uncompromising look at ordinary things. An intention for my photographic practice has been to pay attention to this type of ordinary without it becoming extra-ordinary, and without highlighting the transformation that occurs when such a simple object becomes a picture.

When thinking about this ambition there also a question of how best to describe how such a practice became apparent. Super-ordinary presented too much of an excessive linguistic contrast and other superlatives would function similarly. The Intra-ordinary – *intra* being within – productively describes this photographic practice as one that considers the ordinary from within the everyday, from a position on the outside, and without exposing the subtlety of its appearance and the vulnerability of its reality. Looking within the ordinary, through photography, is not without a sense of irony, as it is commonly accepted that photography only

describes the surface of things. In this research, I have been making pictures which are descriptions of simple things, but that through a break with the original context of production become opened out for the viewer. It is as though the stones and rocks in *Outside of the Walls* – whilst only showing their external form – become sectioned, revealing something of their internal structure – that which is beyond vision – through the alienating photographic process.

Georges Perec titles his poetic anthropological analysis of the everyday *the infra ordinary*. These similar prefixes (infra and intra) come before a shared interest in the quotidian, but they have subtle differences, which are relevant in the use of the intra-ordinary as a concept to think about the activity of this photographic practice. Perec remarks on the silence of quotidian things stating,

What's really going on, what we're experiencing, the rest, all the rest, where is it? How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs everyday: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?... How are we to

speak of these 'common things', how to track them down rather,
 how to flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they
 remain mired, how to give them a meaning, a tongue, to let
 them finally speak of what is, of what we are. (Perec and Sturrock,
 2008:209-210).

Infra is below, suggesting a subterranean perspective, a property of being underneath, or below the surface, whereas intra is within the ordinary, related to a property of the substance of the thing being considered. The intra-ordinary as a concept for considering things through photographic mediation has more to do with the definite object, the thing, which in some way it is to be overcome. Whilst the photographic image is only applied to the surface of an object, the framing of the photograph internalises the object, it is contained psychically and materially.

Intra- is within the world of the picture, it is a separation from an external context. Infra- circulates the object and might deal more with language.

Duchamp, in *notes on the infra-mince* (the infra-slim), describes a quality of engaging with everyday things, inviting a harnessing of the wasted energies of everyday events such as 'the excess of pressure on an electric switch, the

exhalation of tobacco smoke...laughter (or the) dropping of tears'. Paying attention to the potential physicality of such fleeting moments might produce a tangible product, a useable energy in this case, but Duchamp also states that the infra-slim is purely an adjective and not a noun, it cannot be a thing. He writes,

I chose on purpose the word slim which is a word with human, affective, connotations, and is not an exact laboratory measure.

The sound or the music which corduroy trousers, like these, make when one moves, is pertinent to infra-slim. The hollow between the front and back of a thin sheet of paper... it is a category which has occupied me a great deal over the last ten years. I believe that by means of the infra-slim one can pass from the second to the third dimension (Duchamp et al., 1980).

Duchamp suggests that this is a qualitative or perhaps conceptual measurement; it cannot be precisely measured or even measured at all. It is an adjective applied in certain instances of imaginative and perceptual uncertainty – to something that can not be captured, measured or reached. To even try to capture the energies

he describes would be futile, if an attempt was made then their physicality would simply dissipate. Here, there is also a relationship with the process of making a photograph of an object. There is often an unknowable transition between an object and its image; this space between can be articulated as a distance between third and second dimension, as Duchamp describes. When the photograph becomes presented as a printed object it might also be considered to be on the boundary of the third dimension. Duchamp's interest in passing between dimensions, as with his note about the dimensionality of a sheet of paper, is indicative of the contemporaneous developments in modern physics and the discovery of sub-atomic particles⁵. Although the positivist approach of early 20th century physics might well seem to clash with Surrealism's systematic irrationality, there is also resonance between the two in what can only be seen as a discovery of the marvellous; that which is beyond visual and bodily perception.

Informed by these theorisations of the ordinary, my own rationale of the intra-ordinary has come to operate within this practice as a conceptual framework for making pictures of objects so as to disguise their ordinariness. A use of

⁵ See PARKINSON, G. 2008. *Surrealism, art, and modern science : relativity, quantum mechanics, epistemology*, New Haven, Conn. ; London, Yale University Press.

photography through the intra-ordinary defines a process of finding an object and fantastically transforming the possibility of what that object may look like in a photograph and internalising that process within the physicality of the picture. It is a theme of my practice that whilst the photograph still provides a document of an object, words are held-up, slowed down, at the least becoming indefinite, allowing the overlooked object used in the process to remain fleeting and undefined. What started out as a way of thinking about photographing ordinary things that presented their appearance as simple things, but also something else, has become an aesthetic category. The intra-ordinary is a way of naming that aesthetic, functioning as documentary evidence of the objects, whilst producing a significant pictorial space that constructs the imaginary; the indiscernibility between the real and the unreal⁶.

⁶ See Giles Deleuze p42.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SIMPLE PICTURES: THE THING ITSELF (BUT ALSO SOMETHING ELSE)

The photographs under consideration within this project appear at first sight as simple pictures. They certainly look plain; there is no dramatic event, nothing remarkable is happening, all that can be seen is objects pictured within enclosed, framed spaces. There is no evidence of effort to prevent someone seeing what is shown in the picture. There is no screening or covering of the image or what it shows. Neither is there any chemical or digital manipulation evident; the objects in the pictures seem to be easily perceived, viewed through the medium of photography. Yet, there is effort made in creating this intentionally inert space. In attempting to neutralise and remove signs of the activity of the photographer and the world outside the frame, the space constructed alienates the object. As David Campany suggests, certain pictures can become enigmatic and ambiguous:

The most elusive of images, those most in need of active interpretation or supplement, are often the ones that look the most plain or obvious. This is because there is never an absolute

separation of the fantasy and reality either of images or of objects (Campany, 2004:266).

The obvious image is one that appears as the simplistic, straight document, one that seems to appear like a copy of reality. Campany identifies a reasoning for subjectivity as a difficulty in drawing the line between fantasy and reality, as though when looking at simple photographs – those in which a scene appears as though it could be directly before the viewer – it becomes difficult to determine if the object represented by the photograph can be thought of only as a copy when viewed in the image or that in addition, its seemingly neutral mediation invites imaginative speculation.

Written in 1945, Andre Bazin's *The Ontology of the Photographic Image* interrogates the photograph to discuss what it *is* and how it functions in relation to other image making processes. Knowledge of the mechanical nature of the medium – compared to painting or drawing – is said to have transformed the psychology of the viewer's engagement with the reality of what is pictured. He states,

[w]e are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually re-presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space... The photographic image is the object itself freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it (Bazin, 2010:92).

It is suggested that the photographic image both confirms the reality of the object that is photographed and at the same time liberates itself from pure resemblance; potentially becoming something more. This opens up the photograph as a type of picture offering interplay between the real and the imaginary, and objects and images. Discussing the surrealists' use of the photograph Bazin writes that with their adoption of the medium '[e]very image is to be seen as an object, and every object as an image.' (93). Here, through using photography and realising its potential to play with a viewer's appreciation of the reality of things pictured, additionally the surrealist provide an ontological question of objects, and the nature of their being in the world.

Jean Baudrillard's essay 'Photography, or the writing of light' (Baudrillard, 2000)

similarly suggests that photographic images can be more than just a copy of the

real. He states,

[t]he technique of photography takes us beyond the replica into the domain of the trompe l'oeil. Through its unrealistic play of visual techniques, its slicing of reality, its immobility, its silence, and its phenomenological reduction of movements, photography affirms itself as both the purest and the most artificial exposition of the image (online).

His reference to trompe l'oeil highlights the process of photography as a trick, one which although as a copy looks pure – just like the real scene – is also artificial, as a product of that very mediation; creating stillness, silence, and a cutting out of context. He continues,

at the same time, photography transforms the very notion of technique. Technique becomes an opportunity for a double play:

it amplifies the concept of illusion and the visual forms. A

complicity between the technical device and the world is

established (online)

The suggestion is that the photographic technique exaggerates a scene through each photograph's (and photographer's) specific framing of the world. The photograph as a corrupted copy, as an illusion of the real, is not the product of an objective mechanical process, it is constructed as such through culture (the world).

Yve Lomax also speaks of the complicit relationship between photographs and the viewer, that although the photograph is known not to show a true copy of the real, the sense of it as such is required to go beyond what the image shows as document.

Although we may protest against the so-called façade which representation puts before us in framing the world has it not been this very front which has allowed us to assume another

side. Indeed, has it not been this front which has allowed us to assume that the real world is on another plane... [i]t has been representation which has afforded us a presence beyond representation (Lomax, 2000b:21-22).

Lomax states that the photograph is taken to be a trace, imprint or transfer⁷, and our belief in this means that at the same time this 'front' of the photograph is recognised, and the photograph becomes a picture to be subjectively interpreted; it is simultaneously seen as an objective record.

The perspectives of Campany, Baudrillard and Lomax have some similar features. Across their respective discussions is a concern with the photograph *not* functioning as representation, or being beyond representation; Or with the photograph being a fantasy and a trick of the eye, whilst also being thought of as a document of the real world; a pure image or replica. This apparent uncertainty about what the photograph *is* begins to illustrate the complexity of theorising

⁷ Terms used by Rosalind Krauss in attempt to affirm that the photograph is primarily bound to objects in the world, see notes on the index parts 1 and 2, discussed later in this thesis pp41-43.

photography's relationship with reality. The photographic image operates as a paradox; it is thought of as being a representation of the real as well as presenting something unreal.

Campany speaks of simple images requiring the most interpretation or supplement. Pictures such as the ones made within this project are simple, single objects on plain backgrounds; these are a type of image that exemplifies the paradox. Through their apparent realism, their obvious state as *just* pictures of things, they are catalysts for fantasy. Giles Deleuze states:

The imaginary isn't the unreal; it's the indiscernibility of real and unreal. The two terms don't become interchangeable, they remain distinct, but the distinction between keeps changing round... I think the imaginary is this set of exchanges (Deleuze, 1995:66).

It is these simple still life pictures, where images of objects are perceived to appear in the same way as they might normally appear without photographic mediation that the real and the unreal of the image become difficult to tell apart

and it is an imaginary interpretation rather than objective study that is prevalent.

A body of photography theory that is in dispute frames reflections, analyses and discussions on the processes and the works produced in this project. The question of what the photograph *is* continues to be a concern, despite attempts through formalism, post-modern and now post-photographic⁸ discourse to find a defining essence of the medium. Through my literary research and developed understanding of the relationship between photography and the representation of the real, I have felt that this fragile theoretical territory has a resonance with the interpretation of my pictures.

In this literature review I consider different theoretical ideas and photographic practices that have examined photography's relationship with reality. Since the invention of photography, Fox Talbot's naming of his imaging process as 'sun pictures' and the titling of his book as *The Pencil of Nature* implied a natural and automated connection to the world. Things in the world were described as having

⁸ The notion of the post-photographic is taken from Geoffrey Batchen, making references to practices that are 'after but not yet beyond photography' BATCHEN, G. 2001. *Each wild idea : writing, photography, history*, Cambridge, Mass. ; London, MIT Press. p109.

drawn their own pictures (this discussion is taken up on p56) as though human intervention in arranging the photographic event was not of consequence in their production. There has been much scholarship in this field of photography and representation, and the field remains contested in relation to both the pictorial and mechanical significance of the medium. The objective of this review is to identify the different ways in which writers have considered what the photograph is. Following this review, I refer to artists who have intentionally, or at least intuitively, utilised the uncertainty and ambiguity of what the photograph is and how the viewer of the artwork considers the ontology of photography throughout their work. There is now also the impact of digital culture to take into account, which arguably places the ontology of the medium further into question.

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In his 1966 publication, *The Photographer's Eye* (2003), John Szarkowski sought to identify the characteristics specific to photography; those things that make it distinct from painting and sculpture. He proposed that photography could be aligned with modernist discourse and should be taken into the art museum as

high art. The principles attempted to follow Clement Greenberg's notion of medium specificity, suggesting that each discipline should 'determine, through its own operations and works, the effects exclusive to itself' (Greenberg and O'Brian, 1993:86). Szarkowski proposed that there are five properties that are intrinsic to the medium: [1] The thing itself - engaging with idea that the photograph deals with reality [2] The detail – which is seen as a fragment and thus unable to deal with narrative. [3] The frame – related to the fact that 'the photographer's picture was not conceived but selected'. [4] Time – stating that all photographs are durational. [5] Vantage point – enabled vision from angles such as the bird-eye view and the worms-eye view. Whilst these specific properties of photography sought to define photographs as being different from painting through their descriptive qualities, the photograph was also acknowledged as being a fictional device, as a product of 'the static little black and white image' becoming 'a different thing than the reality itself' (99-102).

Szarkowski's essentialist rhetoric was motivated by what he describes as 'an investigation of what photographs look like, and of why they look that way' (6), within his aesthetisation of the medium there was no concern for the implications

of the social, political and institutional context surrounding the production of photographs and how such context affected meaning. Because of this, postmodern scholars subsequently attacked his treatise. There was a reliance on seeing past the material support (which was in fact the aspect of a medium that Greenburg felt was so important to the notion of specificity) as well as cultural context surrounding production, through to the visual properties of the scene that the camera recorded.

The notion of seeing through the photograph is considered through Kendall Walton's 1984 theory of photographic transparency (Walton, 2008), which regards a philosophy of perception in relation to looking at photographs. He discusses the activity of the photograph in transporting a viewer back to the moment the picture was made, stating that 'we see, quite literally, our dead relatives themselves when we look at photographs of them' (22), or as Gregory Currie describes it 'when we see a photograph of an egg, we see – literally see – the egg itself' (Currie, 2004:no pagination). Whether objects or people, we of course do not see the content of a photograph, in so far as it can be touched or picked up, but instead seeing refers to a particular perceptual engagement brought

about through the mediation of the world through the photographic process.

Walton's theory describes transparency as a product of the mechanical nature of the photographic medium that when compared to drawing produces in the viewer a different way of acquiring information. He uses an example of an artist working in the jungle and uses different types of mediation to question the existence of something highly unlikely, stating:

in the case of the sketches we rely on the picture-maker's belief that there is a dinosaur... the drawings indicate to us what was in the jungle by indicating what the artist thought was there... We trust his judgement (Walton, 2008:36).

The photographer's judgement is assessed differently, regardless of what the photographer thought to be present – 'if the photographs do convince us that there was a dinosaur they do so because they convince *us* that there was a dinosaur, not the other way around' (37). The apparent objectivity of the photographic image allows a viewer to make up their own mind; to judge if a dinosaur might in fact be a plastic model, or a projection, which someone making

a drawing may well see as a very convincing dinosaur.⁹ From a perceptual point of view, photographs allow the viewer to make what is considered to be their own judgement about whatever it is they show and as Fred Ritchin argues, they enable such personal and subjective reasoning because they are 'relatively unmediating' and trustworthy (Ritchin, 1990:2). Walton uses the example of Jerry Uelsmann's photograph *Symbolic Mutation* (1961) to explain relative transparency in photography.



Uelsmann, Jerry. *Symbolic Mutation*. 1961. – 15.7 x 13.9 cm

⁹ It should also be noted that post-structural theorists such as John Tagg and Alan Sekulla would say that it is the institutional context that constructs the meaning of the photograph; the photographic image is never being objectively offered to the viewer. See. TAGG, J. 1988. *The burden of representation : essays on photographs and histories*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Education. and SEKULA, A. 1984. *Photography against the grain : essays and photo works, 1973-1983*, Halifax, N.S., Canada, Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

The picture shows a portrait of a woman superimposed with a closed fist. To the viewer of the picture who has some awareness of processes of photography, it is likely to be clear the picture has been printed using two negatives or perhaps made by a double-exposure. Even to those with no knowledge of photographic techniques, the picture is not accepted as a document. Just because it is a photograph and therefore deemed trustworthy – such an image might only be experienced in a dream, or through hallucination – this does not make the picture seem less transparent, becoming more opaque as the reality effect decreases.

Here Walton suggests that 'their impression of seeing through the picture is weakened' (Walton, 2008:44). Although Uelsmann's image does invite a fantastical reading through its darkroom manipulation, it operates differently to the veracity of the types of pictures described by Company and those which are considered within this project. Such pictures may be easily dismissed or overlooked because of their apparent simplicity and their likelihood to be seen as transparent. But, it is their relative transparency that enables what can be considered a space between image and object where a doubling, transformation or invention occurs for the viewer. When it is looked at for the purposes of art, this makes the

photograph an uncertain entity, and in some cases a quite ordinary object may be made strange or perhaps even un-identifiable as any definite thing.

The post-modern critique of photography stated that the essentialist position of the discipline was not possible and the photograph was not primarily an aesthetic object but a socially active and political device. Douglas Crimp's essay *The Museum's Old/The Library's New Subject* suggests that Szakowski's rhetoric is a perversion of modernist notions and in fact signals the beginning of the post-modern era. He states,

photography is not autonomous... [it is] too constrained by the world that was photographed, too dependent upon the discursive structures in which it was embedded (Crimp, 1989:8).

In this sense it is the world that speaks, rather than the autonomy of the photographer and his or her work. Post-modern discourse positions the viewer of the photograph in the construction of meaning and the significance of the image presented. The viewer brings knowledge, and with that, language to the

photograph rather than any intrinsic quality or message being inherent in the work itself. The meaning of an image functions beyond the acknowledgment of 'the thing itself'; there are also meanings that are constructed through their culturally constructed contexts. Roland Barthes respectively called these a '*denoted* message, which is the *analogon*¹⁰ itself, and a *connoted* message, which is the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it' (Barthes, 1977a:17).

Barthes illustrates the use of these two types of messages in his analysis of a photograph used for a *Panzani* (Italian food product) advertisement. The advert is deconstructed revealing how objects in the photograph have been intentionally selected and arranged to connote "Italianicity" in order to help sell the authenticity of the product. The juxtaposition of tinned pasta sauce and packaged dried spaghetti amongst fresh produce, tumbling from a string bag, as though it has just been bought from the market is one of the ways the language of this photograph is said to operate (Barthes, 1977b).

¹⁰ Earlier in Barthes text, he states 'the [photographic] image is not the reality but at least it is its perfect *analogon* and it is exactly this analogical perfection which, to common sense, defines the photograph' (17)

Victor Burgin, develops Barthes' linguistic analysis of photography putting forward the notion of *intertextuality* as coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966. Kristeva's intertextuality introduces texts as being on a horizontal axis - connecting the author and the reader – and a vertical axis, connecting the text to other texts (Kristeva, 1980:69). For Burgin the photograph is proposed as a text, from which we use a culturally developed visual literacy to decipher meaning. Burgin writes that Barthes conceives text as,

not as an 'object' but rather as a 'space' between the object and the reader/viewer – a space made up of endlessly proliferating meanings which have no stable point origin, nor closure (Burgin, 1986:73).

As with Barthes' idea of the connoted message Burgin's development suggests that meaning is not the domain of the author or maker of a work, but a product of the viewer's specific culturally constructed interpretation. He states that 'meaning is perpetually displaced from image to discursive formations which cross

and contain it' (Burgin, 1982:215-216). For Burgin, the boundaries that define *the text* (an image) are dissolved through its reading, and the text 'opens continuously into other texts' (Burgin, 1986:73). To illustrate intertextuality Burgin uses an example of a drinks advertisement, which features a glass slipper containing cubes of ice and vermouth. This text points to another text, that of Cinderella, and a story of rags to riches, with the notion of romantic love being directly connected to the drink. Intertextuality as a concept for the construction of meaning, suggests that images cannot be innocent. Whether it is intentional or not, making any image is caught up in a web of signifiers, in which meaning flows between texts. Burgin usefully creates a metaphor stating that texts become frayed through intertextuality. Like a fabric that is woven together to create what is seemingly a solid object; by looking closely and picking at the edges, the thin strand-like components are revealed and we begin to see the textual components that make up the space of the work. Burgin's notion of intertextuality functions as a reading of the object in the picture as a representation of that same thing existing in the world, and through the process of implementing a fixed frame, the photograph becomes subject to a myriad of potential interpretations derived from individual cultural or psychological constructions.

Barthes' notion of the denotive status of photography, considered as directly pointing to the object it represents, is utilised by Rosalind Krauss in her 1977 two part essay *Notes on the Index* (Krauss, 1985). Krauss' writing seeks to position different American installation art of the 1970s as being concerned with what is termed the indexical, engaging with (even though all the examples do not directly use photography) what are regarded as photographic tendencies. Within the essays Krauss makes statements in relation to the medium that assert the photograph has direct connection to the real:

The connective tissue binding the objects contained by the photograph is that of the world itself, rather than that of a cultural system (212).

The discussion brings in to photographic discourse the semiotic model of Charles Sanders Peirce, in which the index is part of a triad of signs, also including the icon and the symbol. Peirce notes that the photograph is a type of index and defines it as follows:

[a]n Index is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object... In so far as the Index is affected by the Object, it necessarily has some quality in common with the Object and it is in respect to these that it refers to the object (Peirce and Buchler, 1940:102).

The indexical sign is therefore suggested to be directly caused by 'the Object it denotes' (ibid), with other such examples being smoke from a fire, a footprint and a weathervane. Peirce's icon is different in that,

[a]n icon is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own, and which it possess, just the same whether any such Object exists or not (ibid).

The iconic sign thus refers to the 'Object' through resemblance or likeness rather than causality, with examples being a painted portrait, or a map. Following from Peirce, Krauss proposes,

every photograph is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface. The photograph is thus a type of icon' or visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object. Its separation from true icons is felt through the absoluteness of this physical genesis, one that seems to short-circuit or disallow those processes of schematization or symbolic intervention that operate within the graphic representations of most paintings (Krauss, 1985:203).

Krauss argues that the index is an essential component in the theorisation of photography. In contrast, what can be seen as a firm opposition to this reliance on the index, is Joel Snyder's position in the essays *Photography Vision and Representation* (Snyder and Allen, 1975) and *Picturing Vision* (Snyder, 1980). Using Rudolf Arnheim's *On the Nature of Photography* (Arnheim, 1974) as an indicative example of the perspective of writing on photography at the time, and taking issue with what he sees as an emphasis on causality, Snyder suggests there are two models that describe how photography 'works'; what it does and doesn't

guarantee in contrast to painting. He suggest there is a "visual" model that stresses similarity between the camera and the eye, and a "mechanical" model that stresses the mechanical relationship between a photographic image and what was in front of the camera. He states that:

Writers on photography have often treated these models as though they were identical, or as though one were contained within the other, but this is not the case, and such assumptions gloss over the basic challenge to any theory which attempts to find the meaning of photographic images by referring to their origins - the challenge of extracting pictorial meaning from the operation of natural laws (Snyder and Allen, 1975:149).

The paper continues to defend the case that what we see in photographs is not how or what we see in reality, through discussion of control of exposure, printing technique, the depiction of movement and use of particular film. And that making a photograph may well require as much imaginative investment as a painting in the representation of what is proposed as a "real" scene. A partial previsualisation

is required by the photographer of how a certain arrangement and composition might become significant or meaningful for a viewer. As a result photography is rejected as a 'guarantee of much of anything about the relation between image and imaged' (148), and that a "natural image" is not a 'condition of pictorial significance' (Snyder, 1980:500).

These two positions, one arguing for the index – which promotes the notion of a photograph as primarily being dependent on the image that is already in the world - and one arguing for an iconic emphasis on of the photograph – suggesting that the image a photograph presents is more of a pictorially autonomous image, is important to the project. The contention between the two have influenced and developed this practice, providing a conceptual framework for my thinking and writing about the photographs I have made. The objects I make pictures of are indexically recorded and subsequently presented by the photograph; they iconically resemble some-*thing*, though that *thing* might not always be determinable. Intertextuality would suggest that the viewer brings their own interpretation to the image, but the construction and the particular aesthetic quality of the work might also refer back to Baudrillard's notion of the imaginary

as the indiscernibility of the real and the unreal. The ambiguous space of a photograph might be more so thought of as being symbolic, though symbolism as a product of indexicality, where the viewer is not allowed the knowledge to be able to decipher its code.

Photography's relationship with the real and, through its critical discourse, the index, remains a contested subject matter for photographic studies as indicated through *The Art Seminar*, a published discussion between nine theorists – each having contributed to photographic discourse – who ultimately fail to decisively agree on their independent positions in relation to the importance of the index as a theory of photographic representation (Elkins, 2007). Hilde Van Gelder and Helen Westgeest suggest that the debate in *The Art Seminar* failed to reach any solid conclusions because the participants were considering photography too generally, each thinking of different types of photographs to use in their arguments for indexicality and/or iconicity. They suggested instead that discussion should be around 'a concrete corpus of photographs', which promotes the notion there is no universal theory of photographic representation (Gelder and Westgeest, 2011:34). In this project, there is certainly discussion about the index

and icon to be had; my work focuses on a particular type of photograph, namely those that are pictures of things. This practice could be said to fluctuate between something like still life and a conceptual photographic practice that functions to interrogate photography in a reflexive manner, seeking to examine and reflect on the ontology of the medium through making photographs of objects.

In another analysis of *The Art Seminar* David Bate summarises his thoughts on the discussion, stating that,

In photography theory, there are two camps of theorists: the realists and the anti-realists. The realists include Roland Barthes, Andre Bazin, Susan Sontag and Rosalind Krauss, whilst the antirealists, who believe there is transformation between the referent and the picture include Umberto Eco, Victor Burgin, Peter Wollen and John Tagg (Bate, 2007:253).

The fact the realist position is not specified in this analysis, yet the antirealist position is, locates the general conception of photography as a realist imaging

practice. That is, photography generally, is seen to be, or assumed to show images of reality. In Bate's writing he is assuming that the reader automatically understands (and perhaps adopts) the realist position as the norm and the antirealist, transformative photographic, as a position that challenges the norm. In his book *Photography and Surrealism* (2004), Bate identifies the normative as a 'mimetic photograph', which is the 'totally conventional "normal" use of photographs, as an "illustrative" representation:

In mimesis a photographic sign serves as a mimetic reproduction of the referent (the thing depicted or referred to), which is held to be 'reproduced' photographically. This signifying "naturalism" sees not the picture but only the thing depicted, ignoring the techniques of mediation, perspective, geometry, chemistry, lighting, etc

(Bate, 2004:23).

Mimetic reproduction in photography is therefore not the production of a "natural" picture, but a type of picture with a certain style that uses technical

properties of the medium to signify "naturalism". Joel Snyder is one of the participants in the debate, and maintains his argument against the indexical position:

If you try to go from what you see in the photograph to what was actually in the world at the moment of exposure, you eventually screw up the way we talk about photographs. What we see in photographs is not, either necessarily or even generally, what we would have seen in front of the camera when the picture was taken (Elkins, 2007:134).

For Snyder, the fact that a photograph is dependent upon an object and is reliant on that object, thus making it indexical, is not of pictorial importance. Snyder adopts an iconic and non-indexical position as he feels the latter stops photographs being seen as pictures. What he means by this is that by primarily thinking about photographs as being causally linked to an event or slice of time in the past, prevents a viewer seeing what is pictorially present; the primary focus becomes temporal - as a device for producing memory, rather than spatial - as a

device for producing pictures. This point comes from his emphasis that the historical development of the camera as a device for making pictures came from a desire to automate or even speed up the picture-making process of painting: 'The problem for post-Renaissance painters was not how to make a picture that looked like the image produced by the camera, it was how to make a machine that produced an image like the ones they painted' (Snyder, 1980:512). Instead, in what can be argued as a productive or inventive standpoint, he states that photographs enable perception of things in the world. Suggesting that photographs 'entitize' (Elkins, 2007:154) – a word he uses to suggest that photographs create entities. Snyder continues,

I can't defend this beyond saying that in my bones, it's what I believe. You don't measure photographs against the world: you measure the world against photographs (155).

His statement moves the argument into new territory, suggesting that the photograph enables not just a picture that is similar, but a picture that produces a construction of 'real' things that exist in the world. That the so-called

naturalised visual quality – following from the ideals of perspectival painting – models the way we consider our vision of the world to be constructed.

When a photograph is brought into existence it often *makes* an object in the form of a photograph that is a flat, but nevertheless spatial object. It also often *takes* something from the world: a framed moment and presents it, or re-presents it, at a later point in time. Some photographers and artists will be very aware of the language that they use to describe what they do with photographic equipment. The seemingly subtle difference in language allows – even in only a self-satisfying sense – a reinforcement of a personal philosophy of photography. This investigation is not only conscious of the making of a material thing – the photograph, the print, the art object – but in how a photograph as *image* can be a productive device, able to draw upon the seeing or perception of an object that is presumed to be a product of indexicality and taking this perception beyond the image as mere copy of reality or as document.

There are others who have a similar perspective. In his essay *Photography and*

Reference Olivier Richon¹¹ cites examples questioning how something's picture might already exist in the world before the camera comes into play. Here the camera is seen as a means to see a picture that is already present. He writes of Fox Talbot's reports on his early photographic experiments: 'In the summer of 1835, I made in this way a great number of representations of my house [...] and this building I believe the first that was ever known to have drawn its own picture' (Talbot in (Richon, 2007:6). In the same respect, a request to take someone's picture might also suggest that the portrait is already there. Richon's writing examines Talbot's *Scene in a Library*, a darkened frontal depiction of two shelves of books. The image shows an obviously internal library scene, but the photograph was made outside, and the scene deliberately constructed for the camera. Although the mechanics of the picture are photographic, the construction of the picture and internal world created within is more like a painting, and even refers to *trompe l'oeil*; illusionistic paintings in which the eye is tricked into thinking the image is a real object. In reading this picture and similar ones accompanying it, the iconographic image of library (books on shelves) is

¹¹ Note that Richon's practice also uses objects, is predominately studio based and involves making images that are not intended as straight representations of the objects used for pictures. *Real Allegories* a collection of his work refers to the realism of the photographic image that is at the same time coded as allegory.

produced for the viewer before any sort of presentation of the courtyard space in which they were made. The frame cuts off actuality and a virtual space is constructed within. The frame of the photograph as a division between inside and outside is thus made integral to the potential for photographic perceptual invention.

This is a strange situation. The referent is the absence of the object, an object whose image is present in the photograph. The object, in order to cause its image, in order to come first, needs the help of the photograph. It is thus the photograph of the object that enables the object to come first. The photograph comes second, the object comes first. I was here first claims the object. Yet the first time needs the help of the second time in order to be first. Without the second time, the first time would be the first time of nothing. The first time, in and by itself does not succeed in coming into existence without the help of the second time. The second time however does not usurp the place of the first, as it always comes second. The first time because of its

dependency upon the second time, actually comes third (Richon, 2007:10-11).

By acknowledging the referent is dependent on the photograph, the potential for perceptual invention may take place. The photograph shows a thing and that thing is known to have existed, it was present for the camera and this is its indexical representation. It is this facticity, which places the photograph as a temporal marker – something, *that has been* as Roland Barthes states (Barthes, 1981:77). If the referent is already displaced, at the origin, there is nothing. In place of the absent referent there becomes a void to be filled and in this case the photograph becomes a potential for things.

Indexicality functions as security that the objects in the frame of the photograph were undeniably present before the camera. Yet knowledge of existence does not necessarily mean recognition of the object and the significance of the photograph as a fixed sign is also called into question. Snyder uses an example of a photograph of a person sneezing, who appears pictorially only as a blur, to help address problems of not seeing photographs as pictures. The blurred smudge,

produced as per the photographic process does represent the event taking place, but pictorially produces an unrecognisable mark that cannot be recognised as the scene. The proposition is that to see and use photographs as pictures relies on recognition of and resemblance to the appearance of the world, thus emphasising an iconic theory of photography by suggesting the indexical is potentially pictorially flawed.

The idea of the photograph as a copy or trace of reality is still of absolute relevance, as shown by the inability to agree on a (general) position for photography in The Art Seminar. The position is stated by John Berger in his 1968 essay 'Understanding a Photograph', and addressed by John Tagg who states that,

Berger has argued that 'photographs are records of things seen', an 'automatic record'. 'Photography', he has added, 'has no language of its own'. 'There is no transforming in photography.'

The only decision is the choice of a moment to record and isolate. (Tagg, 1988:187).

By this reckoning, things in photographs stay as they are. In contrast John X Berger and Olivier Richon develop thinking about the operation of the photograph in their 1989 joint publication *Other Than Itself: Writing Photography*, illustrating the changeability of photography criticism:

When thought of as an analogical system of representation, photography runs the risk of being understood as an unmediated representation: an unadulterated transposition of objects in the world onto the photographic surface. Similarly, for those who hastily interpret Peirce's analysis of images, the photograph as indexical sign emphasises an edenic notion of the visual: the photograph as an imprint of the world, a fossilised referent, a trace of Nature: an aesthetic of the image seemingly devoid of any rhetoric. Analogical and indexical signs necessarily imply a transformation (Phillips et al., 1989:no pagination).

Photography is dominantly perceived as having documentary authority, which

separates it from the subjectivity of other imaging practices such as painting and drawing. Barbara Savedoff writes that cultural uses of the medium, such as the 'special weight of evidence in trials, the efficacy of photographs in blackmail, their role in scientific and historical research, their use by insurance companies, and for passports and identity cards,' all position photographs as accurate and trustworthy records of real events or objects (Savedoff, 2008:112). Such use of photographs makes them socially functional objects. They are produced with clear and specific intentions that are unlikely to be subverted, held in archives, kept in filing cabinets, or on computer hard-drives. It is expected that they be organised, labelled and retrievable in order to fulfil their functions. Yet Clive Scott also sees that this authority has the potential to dissolve with photographs shifting from being indexical to iconic:

Over time, straight photographs that were first strongly related to the referent as index become interesting photographs to look at in different ways when we do not know and do not bother anymore about the who or where (Scott, 1999:37).

If photographs have the potential to become less about the actual space present before the camera when the shutter is pressed, there is also potential to intentionally construct a process of distancing a viewer from reality from the start. Photographs can be made deliberately in order for them to be read as more iconic than indexical, more inventive than representational, more pictures than photographs. It is also interesting that Scott refers to a gradual lack of interest in the 'who or where' of photographs. In his discussions he mainly has a focus on photographs of a documentary type, those that tend to be of people and places. What is not considered is an increase in potential for photographs that are not filled with people and places to be more alienated from their index and therefore more likely to be perceived as non-representational and instead inventive.

The incorporation of digital culture into photographic practice has more recently, contributed to new critical perspectives on how the technologically reformulated medium is or is not able to represent reality more adequately than analogue photographic media. An early analysis comes from William J. Mitchell, in his book *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (Mitchell, 1992).

In terms of the information rendered by each type of media, he writes that,

there is an indefinite amount of information in a continuous-tone [analogue] photograph, so enlargement usually reveals more detail but yields a fuzzier and grainer picture... A digital image on the other hand, has precisely limited spatial and tonal resolution and contains a fixed amount of information. Once a digital image is enlarged to the point where its gridded microstructure become visible, further enlargement will reveal nothing new (6).

Arguing against Mitchell, Lev Manovich suggests that in practice the digital image offers much more information than the analogue image. Writing that with digital images, we have more information than we need, making the point that we have '[s]atellites that can photograph the licence plate on your car and read the time on your watch' (Manovich, 1996:57). In theory Mitchell's position makes sense, but in practice digital cameras, are now capable of producing an image in which the elemental component of the pixel is not reached by the viewer, or a regarded as a problem for the photographer.

Mitchell also proposes that digital technology radically transforms the relationship that photography has with the real because of its increased mutability; the ease with which it can be transformed, suggesting that analogue images 'seemed to have special claims to veracity' whereas with digital images present 'a new uncertainty about status and interpretation of the visual signifier' (17). Manovich similarly disputes this claim, insisting that photography has always been manipulated, transforming what is perceived as a representation of the real. Geoffrey Batchen similarly emphasises that even the straight photograph manipulates what is normal perceptual engagement with the world, stating,

what else is photography but the knowing manipulation of light levels, exposure times, chemical concentrations, tonal ranges and so on (Batchen, 2001:139).

In what can be suggested to be a more intuitive approach to thinking about photographs and their relationship to reality, the philosopher Scott Walden argues that analogue images enable the viewer to approach the image with more faith in its relationship to truth. Digital images are considered as engendering

have less confidence in the viewer's consideration of the potential truthfulness of the image presented (Walden, 2008:108-110).

There is also the situation to consideration that a viewer might not be able to determine whether an image is made by digital or analogue means. Digital print media is of a sufficient quality to be indistinguishable from a darkroom print, and analogue produced negatives are also readily scanned with a final digital output, either as a physical print, screen based or projected image. The physical nature of photography and its consumption is certainly hybridised and the question of how this impacts on an appreciation of objects *in* photographs, and the photograph *as* object is considered in relation to my own practice later in this thesis. In relation to the physical nature of the medium Sabine T. Kriebel asks,

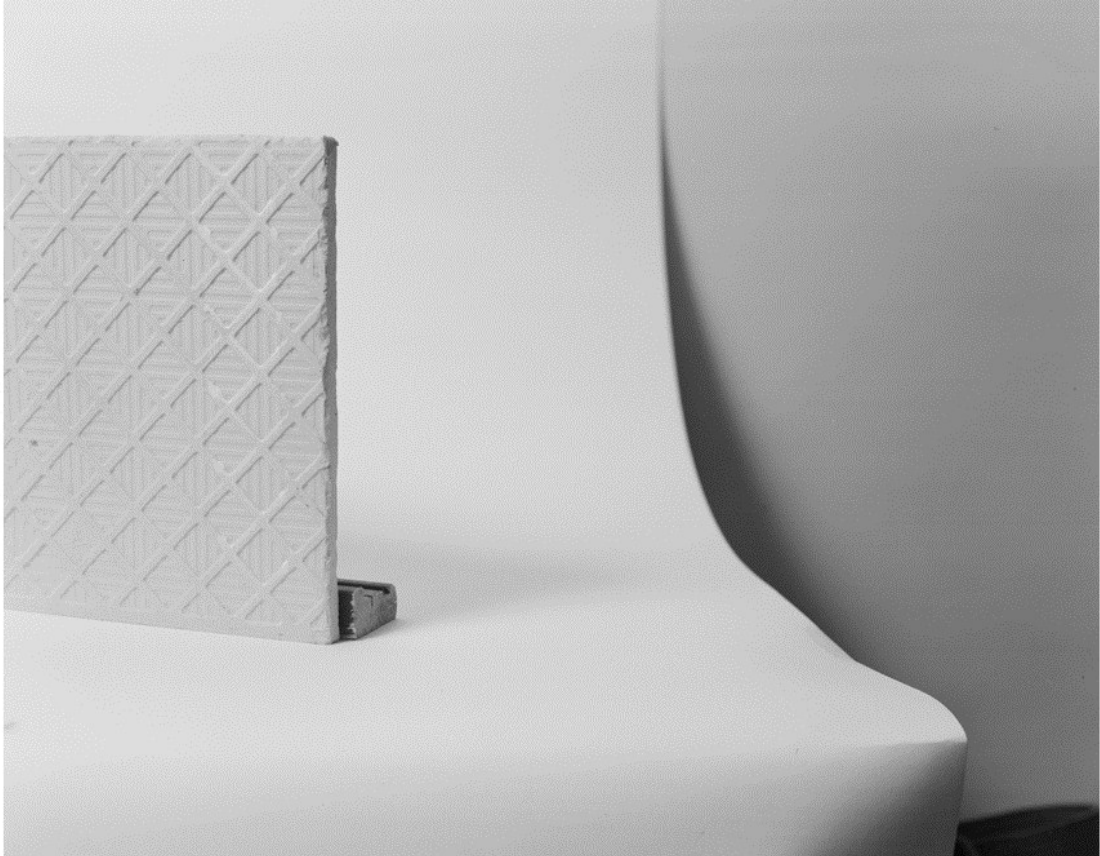
how does this matter mean? How do the material and physical processes of different photographic practices contribute to the meaning of the image represented?... Given the increasing authority and omnipresence of digitality and virtuality, these questions about photography and its materiality seem as the

more urgent and productive (Kriebel, 2007:42-43).

This "material turn" is essential to an understanding of contemporary photographic art practice, as it filters through new media criticism, proposed radicalisations in theories of photography and representation, as well as a shift in a wider cultural production, consumption and distribution of photographic images.

The literature reviewed, setting out many different ideas about photography and representation functions as a framework with which to consider the work made within the project. The deliberately constructed de-contextualised space of the picture cuts out the world, creating a space designed to appear inert. Its connection to the actual event of the picture is severed and narrative becomes internalised within the fragmented iconicity and the materiality of the picture entering into a relationship with the viewer.

A BREAKTHROUGH IMAGE: AN INDICATOR OF ILLUSION



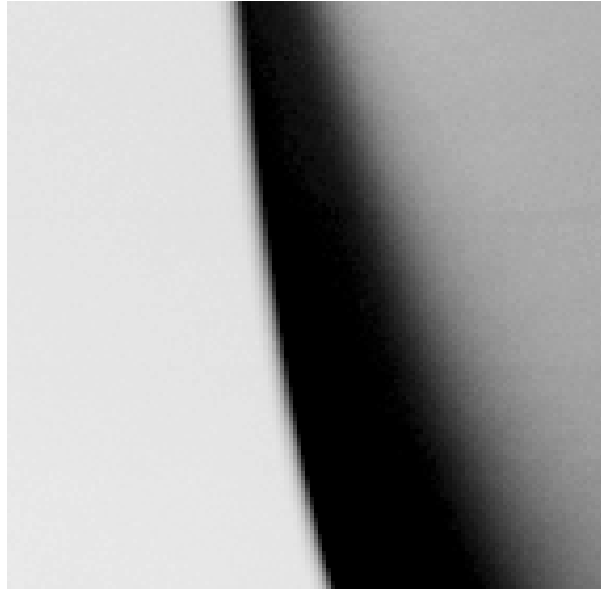
The picture above was made as the product of an accident. As is usual, the intention was for the object to be centrally located in the image, but during its making the tripod head supporting the camera was swung to the right of the object, coming to a stop so the frame divided the tile and revealed the edge of the paper background. Initially I was not aware of how this picture would become

significant and the conceptual clarification it would lead to. I only found the awkward composition pleasing and worth making the picture. Once I had made this first picture, although I would not normally make another picture using the same object, I was drawn to recompose the tile in a central position, though in the second instance the background was changed from being the seamless cove type, as seen above, to a horizon type background. This image has informed this research practice in a number of ways. Firstly, the piece functions as an indicator of the two worlds (inside and outside of the picture) that the viewer engages with whilst looking at the photograph. It is also useful to help think about the installation of the work in a gallery space; functioning as a single image outside of the main series, one that functions to inform a reading of the series. It is a comment on the production of a pictorial illusion that is itself an illusion.

Secondly, it has engendered photo-sculptural considerations of this practice and photographic practice in general, providing an alternative object based framework to consider the photograph as artefact as well as the contents of its frame.

The picture breaks the continuity of the centrality of object, revealing a piece of wooden picture frame acting as prop and supporting the tile which would

otherwise fall over. The presence of the broken-up frame, within the framed space of the picture further indicates the significance of framing itself. There is dissolution of the boundaries between one space (*that* space which is looked into) and another space (*this* space which is looked from). The roughly sawn wooden edge is abrupt, an edge which contrasts the soft, graduated edge beyond the whiteness of the paper coving. This black and lightless shadow graduates through to the grey wall behind. Though when looking at this picture, I do not always see the wall as being *behind*. There is a flow in tonality across the space from white, to a sort of shadow of black, then the black of the shadow itself, then disintegrating into a stone cold grey. This way of looking at the image, thinking through contemplation, flattens out the photographic presentation of space. The tonal gradation perhaps looks drawn on, like charcoal, or watercolour and the 'real' gap – the space between the paper and wall behind it – becomes more difficult to see.



James Elkins thinks that the *surround* is a better way to describe backgrounds in photographs. The *surround*, he writes,

is not the same as the background that painters know, because backgrounds are put in mark by mark and are therefore always noticed, always intended (Elkins, 2011:116-117).

He refers predominantly to vernacular photography where the background of a picture is not particularly considered, whereas in fine art photographs the image produced as a whole is said to be taken more into account and the background considered as much as whatever is the main object of attention.

Ground and background are two of the terms artists use: there are also *backdrops*, *frames*, *negative spaces* and *settings*. The surround is something different – it is, I think one of the best names for the gap between painting and photography (117).

I think the use of the term surround does something else in addition to Elkins' proposal. The surround as unintended background makes sense in terms of the passive space that is around an intended subject matter, but as an alternative to the backgrounds of paintings, it also helps to see the photographic print as a flat pictorial object. Background suggests a space that is behind the object in the foreground, whereas surround steamrollers the space, there is the object and there is the pictorial space, which is around it, not behind it or in front of it. To see the space around the object as a flat arrangement of tonal distribution means to look alternatively to the representation of three-dimensional space and focus on the print as an object that shows a picture.

A space is revealed, which shows the existence of the world outside of the

photograph, only it doesn't give much away about what it might contain; there is an edge, there is a boundary, and there is shape and tone, but nothing in the way of other objects. The fore edge of the paper reveals a bruise. There is a crease where background paper falls off the front of the tabletop, visually illustrating gravity pulling it vertically into unlit shadow and unknown space. It is interesting that in other pictures (an example is shown below), which do not show the other space; the real space, it seems as though there is much less action of invisible forces. There are creases and folds in some of the background materials, though these do not appear to be under any stress or strain.



Penny, David. from the series *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals*. 2013.

As the framing does not show anything beyond the background and there is no separation from one space to another they are more so in an un-reactive bubble that is distinct from the world outside of the frame and appear not to be under the same normal rule of forces. It is not until the world from which the viewer stands is revealed to the right of the white paper background and consequently, the illusion of the self-supporting monolith is undone, that the viewer can anchor the other pictures in the main series (an example is shown above) to be other than that real space. This *breakthrough image* operates as an "evidence" of the conditions in which the objects used in this practice are made into pictorial elements.

There is another mark a little further back from the creased forward folding edge. It is as though someone has tried to take a bite from edge of the paper. The real gnawing into the virtual to consume it and take on its properties.



Seeing these fantastical teeth marks as the size of a human mouth illustrates my own projection into the image and a reading of the potential size of things in that world. This takes place through a rationalization of the two spaces (this & that). *That* space in the picture is judged in relation to *this* space that the viewer occupies and it is a sense of the presence (and presentness) of the body in front of the picture, the location where such evaluation begins. This visual evaluation of the materiality of things in the picture can be thought through in the terms of Webb Keane's concept of bundling (Keane, 2005). Keane suggests that material properties of things are bundled together with the linguistic sign for that thing,

he writes:

Qualities must be embodied in something in particular. But as soon as they do they are actually and often contingently (rather than by logical necessity), bound up with other qualities – redness in an apple come along with spherical shape, light weight, sweet flavour, a tendency to rot, and so forth. In practice, there is no way entirely to eliminate that factor of copresence, or what we might call *bundling* (188).

Bundling can also be used from the opposite direction. To look at a picture of an apple and to determine its image as the iconic sign apple, is also to bundle these other sensual and material traits along with it. To look at an image of something that is not entirely determinable is to also try to visually find its other material characteristics; it's shape, size, weight, taste and texture, and well as trying to find a way to name it.

Also revealed is the method of support for the tile, which keeps it upright whilst

the picture is made. A simple piece of wood, a section of picture frame in fact, illustrates the simple illusion that is (literally) hidden behind the other pictures, whilst also revealing the intention to empower them to conceal and deceive the viewer. Seeing the support adds another object to the space, the other pictures show single objects, or multiple objects combined and intended to appear as one object, but here there are two. In addition, the disclosure of the edge of the background reveals this as a sheet of paper, as another object in this composition and that of the other pictures in the project, here my awareness of the status of the background is transformed from being incidental to being equivalent. The traditional still life, typically considers the representation of objects, but in these pictures, through the development of a specific practice, attention is drawn not only to the centrally located thing as object, but the background as another thing to be considered.

This picture and its analysis function as a good summary of the different conceptual ideas used within this project to help to make and evaluate photographic work as a research practice. There is the indication of the two spaces revealed by the picture; inside the frame and outside the frame, the real

and the non-real. Here, the work highlights the simple illusion of photography as well as the intention to trick or deceive the viewer. It has also engendered a sculptural discussion of my photographic practice, which begins here with a consideration of the arrangement of objects. Materiality as an acknowledgement of the importance of the photographic print has followed from my thoughts about the objects used in the images and the potential relationship between the two. In addition the image helps to illustrate how the viewer might interpret and engage with the pictures, how what is being seen in that picture becomes rationalised for the viewer.

PART ONE

METAPHORS OF SHROUDING AND THE INTERPRETATION OF CODES

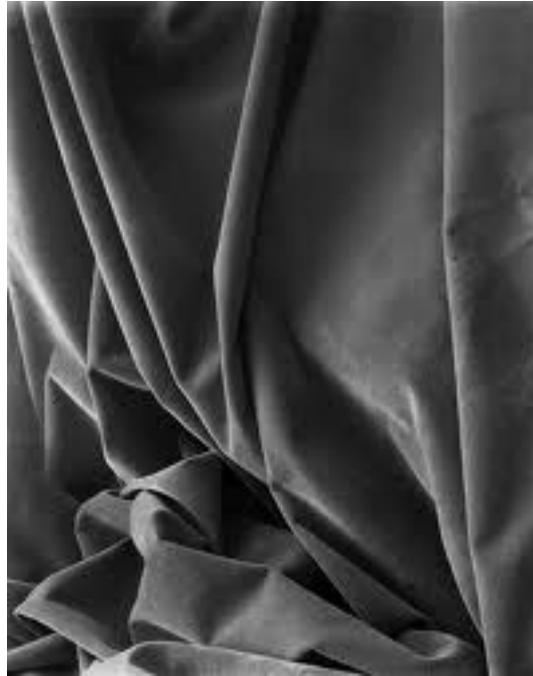
The methodology and my conception of the intra-ordinary illustrate my intentions to protect the vulnerability of the everyday objects through my photographic practice. The photograph has the ability to shroud the everyday, it covers it up and protects through a construction of concealment, which draws the viewer into a sensation suggesting there is something else to know. Man-Ray's work *L'Enigme d'Isidore Ducasse*, originally an objet d'art is a surrealist use of photography characteristically engaging with the everyday.



Man-Ray. *L'Enigme D'Isidore Ducasse*. 1920, (printed c.1950). - 9.9 x 11.7 cm

Adopted by the Surrealists as an emblem of their movement and reproduced on the first page of the first issue of their first periodical, the work is a sewing machine with an army blanket tied around it. As object, the uncertain anthropomorphic shape is unidentifiable but as photograph it not only speaks of the enigmatic properties of this particular object, but also suggests that the photographic process itself wraps things up, preventing touch or an alternative angle of view. Shrouding and drapery as a metaphor for the illusive properties of the photograph can be found in other instances. James Welling's *Drapes* (1981-

1989)¹² function to cover up the convention of photographic transparency, denying the agency of the photograph as a transparent representational device.



Welling, James. *C47*. 1981. - 9 ½ x 7 ½ in

Similarly, John Kippin's photograph titled *ENDLESS*, features a red stage curtain, through which the artist stated on the 31st July 2013, via e-mail correspondence '[the image] refers to the constructed process of representation and photography specifically'. Clare Strand's *Skirts* is a set of photographs of different shaped and sized tables covered with pleated tablecloths or "skirts".

¹² see LOOCK, U. 1998. *Photography and Non-Portrayability - James Welling* [Online]. Kunst Museum Luzern. [Accessed 21/05/2013 2013].



Strand, Claire. *Skirts*. 2011.

Each of these is presented before another pleated curtain. These simply constructed images become playful with scale and perceptual transformation, as the object that is usually the support for the still life subject becomes the object of attention itself. Each image is able to perceptually shift between the space appearing as a room with a table in it, to being the surface of the table, presenting another shrouded object. This *drosté* effect – a potentially perpetual cycle of image within an image – functions analogously for the trickery of photography as a medium that can reveal or conceal anything (Rossiter, 2013:43-46).

These artists and their works are part of a spectrum of photographic art practices

that are included in the field that introduced this thesis and to which the project will be shown to contribute. These examples are iconographic metaphors for photographic practice itself, playing with the knowledge that photography describes the objects presented to the camera, but at the same time operates with a process of concealment. In another respect the artists making these works are also conscious of the debates around indexicality and transparency and their work draws the curtain over the metaphorical window preventing a view into the world.

It is this, which is at the core of the project; that my own images as photographic works provide an investigation of the tension between the photograph as a document of reality, whilst also having the possibility of seeing beyond that reality. My own intuitive and at the time uninformed experiments with drapery came through thinking about the tension between making work at home and making work in the studio. A series of photographs of studio stands, used for supporting cameras, were covered over to prevent the viewer determining their identity and function. The concept behind these images was to indicate a move away from the formal space of the studio, though this body of work was not

pursued much further as it was deemed to be too dramatic and literal for my purposes.



Penny, David. *Covered*. 2011.

The obvious covering of things was a technique I chose to avoid in favour of the photograph presenting a seemingly open view to the object; shrouding would come to be a product of the inherent properties of the photograph and not part of the construction for the camera. I wanted to make pictures which appeared to be open to interpretation, those that would invite the viewer in to the image, but

once engaged, the work's simplicity would transform the viewers reading, inviting engagement with fantasy and speculation. The image below is indicative of the first series of work, *Outside of the Walls*.



Penny, David. from the series *Outside of the Walls*. 2011.

A colour photograph of a rock, standing upright upon a paper background as though it is to be visually inspected through its photographic reproduction; this method of arranging a picture, in which all other distracting things are not

included in the photographic frame, disallowed by the use of a plain paper background, exaggerates focus on the object insisting that "this is the thing to be looked at". Although this object might be made to appear like some sort of museum artefact, it was in fact dug up from the ground of my quite ordinary suburban garden. As discussed in the methodology, whilst creating the pictures in this initial series, now titled *Outside of the Walls*, I was interested in how the removal of any contextualising information, either inside the frame as another object or figure, or outside the frame in the form of an accompanying text, could distance the viewer from a knowledge of origin, production and meaning and throw open the possibility of interpretation as well as making them aware of their role as interpreters. The importance of providing additional text in order for photographs to function as accurate documents is well known. Liz Wells identifies that,

the caption does not simply anchor; writing constitutes a further signifier within the complex interaction of discourses with which the viewer engages... Titles or captions, simultaneously anchor, and become implicated in, play of meaning (Wells, 2009:292).

The use of images within institutions, such as museums, requires text to perform this anchoring, displaying an institutional system of organisation and categorisation with which the viewer's intake of information is to conform to and rely upon. This is the type of external photographic contextualisation considered by writers such as Tagg and Sekula to be the origin of meaning for the photograph, challenging any sense of essential or natural significance. This sort of accompanying textual information also has the possibility of being subverted in the creation of artworks. The Surrealists were aware that the intrinsically objective perception of photography could be turned on its head to reveal the presence of, or gain access to the activity of unconscious they saw to be manifest in everyday life. Brassai's *Involuntary Sculpture*, published in the surrealist journal *Minotaure* in December 1933, is a series of six photographs of found objects, with captions most likely attributable to Salvador Dali. The "sculptures" were photographed in such a way to separate them from a usual or expected environment, creating a contextualising space that could not definitely be known. The pictures also deform the appearance of the objects and through the use of the correct analytical tone of language in the text the complete article presents the

photographs in such a way as to:

blur the distinction between ethnography as science and as aesthetic by examining familiar European objects with the same scientific detail as unfamiliar tribal objects and by making them visible in their newfound strangeness—as decontextualized as a mask hanging in a Paris art museum (Conley, 2003:130).

Photographs of a rolled up bus ticket and a lump of toothpaste appear as just that; the surrealist photograph does not transform them, but their potential meanings are transformed through their accompanying texts.

My own works do not rely on accompanying texts or a certain metaphor to disrupt the descriptive power of the photograph and its reality effect. Rather it is the descriptive quality of the photograph, its apparent status as a document.

These pictures have a certain photographic style, which is constructed to play with the viewer, taking advantage of the paradox that is revealed by my *breakthrough* image and suggested by Company, that through their apparent

realism, their obvious state as *just* pictures of things, become catalysts for fantasy.

The empty space seems to strip the photographs of context, whereas in fact the decontextualised environment just replaces that context with an apparently indifferent photographic style. The clinical, sharp format invokes a technical mode of address and creates a psychological state by which the viewer is invited to enter the world of the picture, though at the same time the picture doesn't appear to be that inviting. It is merely descriptive, though it maintains suspense.

This construction is coded by these photographic qualities and can be thought of as an *indexical style*, this style being quite different to the notion of an indexical photograph. Walker Evans' "documentary style" pertained to the fact that he considered the notion of a documentary photograph to be misleading, stating that 'the term should be documentary style... You see, a document has use, whereas art is really useless'(Rosenblum, 2007:340). An indexical style of photography would be one that knowingly and intentionally creates a picture to appear as though it is a direct copy of the object photographed. The *Outside of the Walls* series has functioned as a gateway series – assisting in conceptualising notions of the intra-ordinary and forming this notion of indexical style rather than

the photograph as index. It has additionally led to a repeated use of certain forms of objects in subsequent works. Individual, confidently standing objects have been named *Monoliths* as part of the series *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals*. The word summons a vision of a singular and significant object and was developed as a result of the production and analysis of the picture below.



Penny, David. from the series *Outside of the Walls*. 2011.

Initially this picture was named *Totem* - it was just what first came to mind when viewing the object within the picture¹³ - this instinctive naming might have come from the column-like form of the object and an association to a totem pole. Significantly, the word totem connects the image to a symbolic significance brought through an inanimate object. Mitchell writes that the totem is identified as,

a personal tutelary spirit or a clan emblem... [they are] generally inferior things in the hierarchy of beings... Totems are familiar, everyday items, usually from the natural world that have been found (Mitchell, 2005:122).

It is interesting to consider that an association of the object with some kind of arbitrary significance did not occur until the object was viewed within the picture. As with all the pictures in *Outside of the Walls* the intention was only to disguise

¹³ Done so for my own reference and not intended to be used with any future display of the picture - pictures are often named instinctively for my own purposes so they can be located as digital files and referred to when making notes.

the objects' humble origins and create an aura of significance¹⁴. The making of the picture has transformed the way the object can be imagined by the viewer and its pictorial representation enables a potential transformation of what the thing might communicate to a viewer. In reference to the totem and using the example of an Australian aboriginal sacred object called a churinga, Émile Durkheim writes.

In themselves the churingas are merely objects of wood and stone like so many others; they are distinguished from the profane things of the same kind by only one particularity: The totemic mark is drawn or engraved on them. That mark, and only that mark, confers sacredness on them (Durkheim, 2001:98).

In creating a mark on an object it ceases to become just that object and becomes a representation of something, which to those with knowledge of the significance understand the specific signified meaning of the marking; it comes to denote

¹⁴ Significance is used in the sense of Kristeva – Revolution in Poetic Language, as in something seeming significant but not a definite signified KRISTEVA, J. 1984. *Revolution in poetic language*, New York ; Guildford, Columbia University Press.

sacredness. Here it is the process of becoming a representation, which enables a change in the interpreted significance of the ordinary object. The same can be applied to the *Totem* image. In being made into a picture, the object, which is a very ordinary lump of fragmented concrete, becomes 'marked' by the agency of the photographic frame, through the activity of the photographer. Marking is not a mark on the surface of the object; rather the object enters a photographic frame. Framing as code demarcates significance, creating a boundary of significance through the placing of the object within the space of the frame and the presentation of it as a picture. The empty photographic space serves as the image of a three-dimensional framing device. In the same way as a pedestal frames the sculpture and the gilded ornate frame is placed around the baroque painting, photographic space (as frame) draws attention to the object it presents, as Louis Marin writes 'through the frame the picture is never simply one thing to be seen among many; it becomes the object of contemplation' (Marin, 1996:82). The background or space surrounding the object in these pictures appears to function in this way, as though it is not of concern. According to Derrida the frame should even become unapparent. 'What has produced and manipulated the frame puts everything to work in order to efface the frame effect, most often by

naturalising it to infinity.' (Derrida, 1987:73). Historical perspectives on the conceptual implications of framing also provide insight on my methods of making pictures and the proposed shrouding of the object. Writing about the framing practices of 16th century galleries and museums Ressa Greenberg suggests:

the frame is the device, the agent, that allows the owner/collector, him, to be present, to be visible, as a creator, a creator other and more powerful than the artist, a curator/creator who is framer, author, of a text, a text that can be read apart from the text of the art object, a text, which by circumscribing that of the art object, inscribes its text within a meta-text, a super-text subsuming that of the art object (Greenberg, 1986:online)

Framing then, as a demonstration and display of knowledge of the significance of the object within the frame, may also be applied to the specific method of photographing objects developed through *Outside of the Walls*. Definite knowledge of the object in the picture, the narrative of its production and what it

symbolically represents and is not available to the viewer, in terms of a transfer of power, it is the framing of the photograph that subsumes the object. The indexical style brought about through my intra-ordinary practice draws attention to the objects that are photographed, it is their apparent openness to engagement and their marking as indeterminately significant that enables a kind of shrouding of the object, a shrouding that appears to be non-existent but functions as does the *L'Enigme d'Isidore Ducasse*, becoming generative and speculative through the description of a surface that seems to promise there is something else to know. This is concealment not through literal shrouding, but through containment in the frame, limitation and the suggestion of control.

DISTURBING IMAGES AND THE SPACE OF THE PICTURE

James Elkins suggests that photographs containing people and places are caught up with too much emotion and memory for the viewer to be able to look for what they feel photography really is:

Farewell to pictures that burst with emotion, affect, sentiment, nostalgia, sweetness, warmth. Farewell to pictures with labels and subjects, places and dates, where everything is explained and classified and useful. These are all distractions (Elkins, 2011:116).

Throughout Elkins' book it is made clear that his interest lies in photographs (or parts of photographs) that are ambiguous and unclear in their meanings. He wishes to look at photographs as sterile and straightforward entities; here it is perhaps the image as representation, which is a distraction from the picture as object. Elkins has a desire for photographs as objects, which through their lack of emotive representations, provide a viewing experience that is puzzle-like:

There is a kind of irritation in not being able to understand what I am seeing, and I find I am attracted to that irritation, the way I am perplexed by an itch that I cannot scratch. There is a pleasing irritation in not knowing what is being shown and I enjoy that perplexity providing it doesn't lead anywhere. (I don't want the solution, the explanation) (219).

This sentiment of the photograph as a picturing device resistant to meaning or explanation is familiar within the intentions and ambitions for this project. Trying to find meaning in the photograph being an attempt to fulfil a desire to reach the referent, to see and to come to terms (be content with an understanding of the referent) is a desire to use language to describe what is being seen. The inability to definitely name these things, means that the viewer is drawn into filling in gaps in order to have some kind of mastery over the object, an explanation or narrative around the object is required, but anything certain is halted by the properties of the picture; its aesthetic produced to appear as a closed and guarded space (the intra-ordinary). Nevertheless an attempt must be found to know and understand what is being seen or is made up by the viewer. In reference to his concept of the Punctum, Roland Barthes states that, 'what I can name cannot really prick me. The incapability to name is a good symptom of disturbance' (Barthes, 1981:51). Barthes refers to the potential he sees in some photographs to sharply arrest the viewer, an inexplicable feature that touches them personally, this is also a means to access the unconscious and to intrude beyond the surface. The opposite of the Punctum is the Studium, which refers to

cultural knowledge and a consumption of the image that is not personal or private but that which anyone looking at a particular picture might have.

Regarding the idea of a viewer's mastery of the image, Margaret Iverson writes:

[a] key characteristic of our relation to the studium of a photograph is our self-confident, self possession: we are conscious and in control of our interest (Iverson, 1994:457).

Barthes' thinking about the Punctum is preceded in earlier texts regarding the connection between photography and language. *The Third Meaning* indicates an "obtuse" meaning in photographs, one that is beyond the denotative and connotative (Barthes, 1977c). He speaks of still images, which are erratic and obstinate, as though certain images, extant of context through surrounding narrative flow or additional explanation are unwilling to give up their meaning, whilst at the same time, they have a property or character that indicates meaningfulness could be found somewhere in the image.

I do not know what its signified is, at least I am unable to give it

a name, but I can see clearly the traits, the signifying accidents of which this – consequent incomplete sign is composed (53).

The Third Meaning and the Punctum are similar theoretical positions used for addressing the uncertainty of meaning in photographs. Both interrogate the perceptual uncertainty of the photograph as a document, moving beyond the referential and instead addressing the indeterminately personally poignant. In her reading of *Camera Lucida* through Jacques Lacan's *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Iverson describes the Third Meaning as blunt compared to the Punctum, which is seen as sharp.

While one implies an acknowledgment of subjective loss, the other actually awakens the real of that loss. It is perhaps pertinent that *Camera Lucida* is dominated by the genre of portrait photography in which the question of the presense/absense of the representative subject is most insistent (Iverson, 1994:456).

Resistance to fixed interpretation in the third meaning as a blunt type of subjectivity awakens a desire to know the image. This desire infiltrates the image, bluntness is a dull throb throughout the picture, rather than at a specified point. It is thus the blunt and extended stillness of these pictures of objects, which contributes to the potential openness of their reading.

Consider also the work of the Thomas Demand (Demand et al., 2000). Demand makes life size sculptures out of paper and card, which utilise mass media imagery as their source material. The press photographs used for these often show scenes of historical or political significance, with specific details of imagery and text being removed from the *re*-presented scene. These muted paper constructions seek to forget the details of history allowing the viewer a level of amnesia when faced with the work. Building the models also distances the original real scenes that are primarily pushed away by the photographs of them and then further distanced by the sculptures and their consequent photographic records. The sculptures exist purely for the photograph to be taken and once this is complete, the models are destroyed. There seems to be an attempt to erase the existence of the original, and an aversion to the source photograph, leaving

only an untraceable memory of an event as a photographic object. There is a play here between the photograph that looks like a trace of a scene, though through re-construction iconically resembles the original photograph. The details, such as text, dates and clock faces untie this new emblem of the photograph from any sense of a specific time. Then the sculpture is re-photographed as a straight photograph, which is often printed and installed to appear life-sized. More recently, Demand also covers the walls the work is shown on, with wallpaper designed to look like a theatrical type curtain. This action functioning to suggest a presence or a platform on which a world is played out behind the work. The sculptural origin of Demand's work is not initially explicit through viewing the photograph – it more so becomes apparent through gradual engagement, creeping up as the strange reality of what is pictured becomes apparent.



Demand, Thomas. *Copyshop*. 1999.- 183.5 × 300.0 cm

Demand's work is also part of the field considered here. It plays with the viewer's expectations of what photographs do, what they show, but it is also playing with photography itself. It sits in the paradoxical space between copy and construction, for it is both copy and construction. The work operates quite differently to my own. When we see objects in Demand's photographs, we see iconic signs of definite things, objects in the world, but these are indexes of paper and cardboard models, and as this is revealed, the shrouded significance of the picture is activated. Through their muted stillness they have the same sort of blunt subjectivity that awakens a desire to know the image and find its meaning, but the meaning is only folded inside photography itself, this is a reflexive

practice that both plays with and examines photographic ontology.

The paper 'Photographs and Fossils' by Walter Benn Michaels, discussing an exhibition by Hiroshi Sugimoto; *History of History* (2005 - 2006) is useful to consider another example occupying in the field that utilises and explores the strange status of photographs. In the show, Sugimoto exhibited a series of ancient fossils alongside his photographs and other artefacts during the exhibition. Sugimoto sees the fossils as a revealing of a genealogy of photography, what he suggests as a "pre-photography". The work points to the fossils as index. As Michaels suggests, 'fossils – like footprints, like shadows, like reflections – are a standard example of indexicality' (Michaels, 2007:432). In the case of Sugimoto's fossils they are evidence of the existence of that particular living creature, but they are by no means pictures of the creatures themselves. This is then turned over by the fact that a painting of one of these creatures is a representation of it, but is by no means evidence of its existence.



Sugimoto, Hiroshi. *Carboniferous Sea Bottom (from History of History)*. 2008. - 67 x 53.5 cm

The status of the fossil alludes to the photograph as an evidential document, which is not necessarily a pictorial representation. Sugimoto's practice has been suggested as characteristically exploring the inherent properties of the medium through a subject matter that on the surface does not explicitly direct a viewer to the potential for meaning in the work. As Hans Belting writes,

his goal was to pursue a different kind of work and use repetition

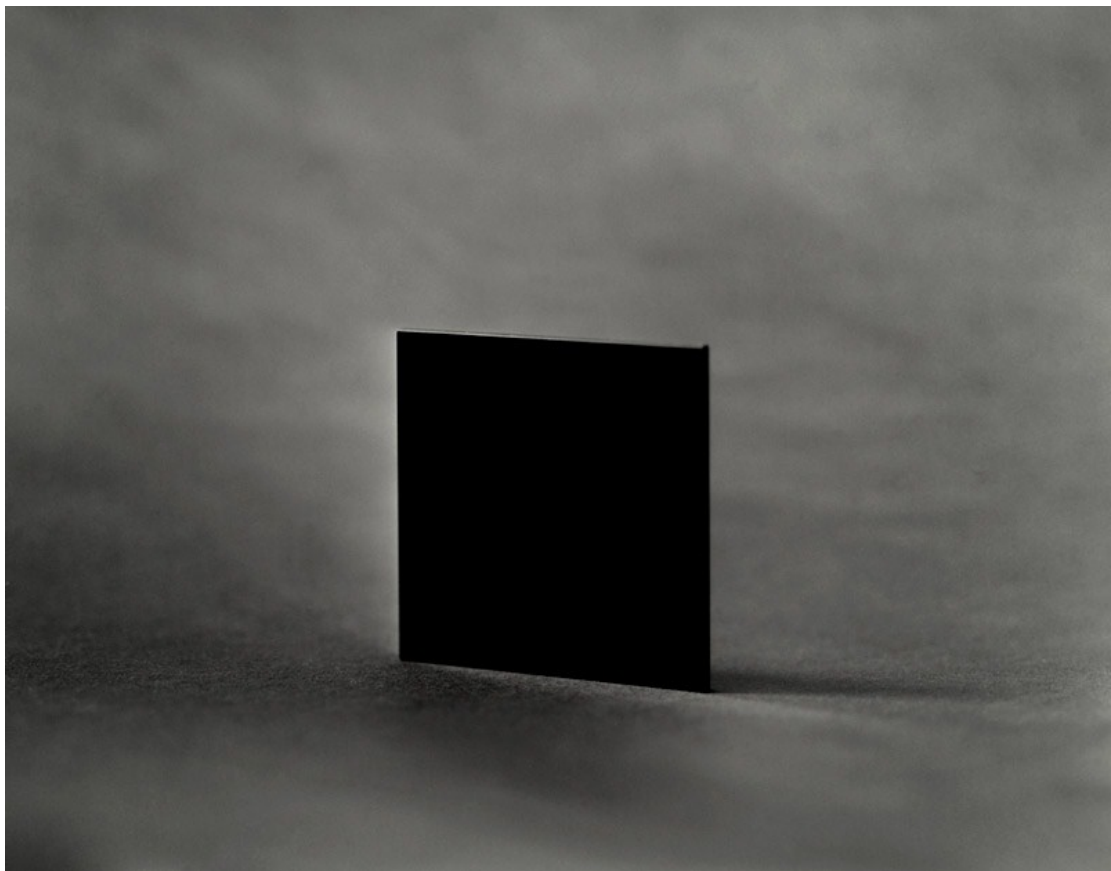
in series to turn photography into a genuine medium for conceptual art... [e]ach individual photograph is simply a variation on another and presents the motif in another state and yet in the same way. (Belting, 2009:82).

The collection *Time Exposed* (Sugimoto and Kellein, 1995) brings together a collection of his work made since the 1970s demonstrating the use of seriality in the projects *Dioramas*, *Seascapes* and *Portraits* (among others), all of which explore indexicality, iconicity and temporality as properties of the medium.

Michaels' paper continues to suggest that as Sugimoto sees the photographs of the fossils (presented in the gallery with the actual fossils) as "'another set of fossils", in effect, fossils of fossils' (432). On a simpler level, the fossil as emblem of photography, where the index is layered over another index, highlights the rhetorical nature of Sugimoto's work. Like Demand's sculptures the fossils function as models of the notion of photographic trace, of reproduction that feigns resemblance to the origin and constructs a practice that tricks the viewer. Sugimoto's work is quieter than Demand's, they both make muted pictures but the spatial and contemplative aspect of Sugimoto's approach to photographic

practice aligns more with my own.

The following work introduces another image from the *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals* series. It is one of the pictures that my *breakthrough image* works with to reveal or illustrate the design or fabrication of illusion. But even with this as indicator and the knowledge that photographs are, as Lomax suggests, '[a] façade which representation puts before us' (Lomax, 2000a:21), the potential for fantasy is prevalent.



Penny, David. from the series *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals*. 2013.

This is the image that appears most obviously as a portal, the one that seems most as though it might lead through to somewhere else; it is also one that plays with uncertainty of representing objects as material things. The protagonistic square shape is a zone of emptiness, it reflects no light, suggestive of a black hole; a condensed point of mass, sucking in light and matter beyond any sense of existence. The black hole also looks like a simple object, the shadow it casts is seen to the right of the square. This black space, which looks like a hole, could also appear as though it is a cut-out from the print, a literal nothingness leading through to a black space behind the image. A cut support of the image might recall the slashed canvases of Lucio Fontana¹⁵, work that sought to break from the illusionistic representation of space on the flat canvas by emphasizing the physicality and potential depth of the painting as object. Here the cut-out itself is a temporary illusion and demonstrates the difficulty of refusing the trace of the object but at the same time, even a momentary thought of the black space as a real hole in the photographic print brings forward the notion of the materiality of the printed object. In addition, the idea that this picture might reveal another

¹⁵ see WHITFIELD, S. 1999. *Lucio Fontana*, London, Hayward Gallery Publishing, South Bank Centre.

space behind the print functions similarly to the *breakthrough image*; it is a pointer to another world, other than the world of the image – the same world that the viewer looks from. The black square is very black, its depth of blackness is designed to be captivating, it seems to pull in the gaze, affecting the viewer. The object is actually a small piece of black glass, now well beyond its original intended purpose of being something very black used to calibrate for density readings in B&W photographic prints. There is also a slight reflection from this object, which suggests that it does reflect some light. But in the picture the reflection is a dull and murky puddle of shadow, this appears like a reflection of black light. The interplay of light and shade is a little strange in this image. Between the object and the dull reflected shadow is a strip of white light, this is light reflected from the object from the same direction as the shadow behind the object, but it seems too narrow as though the puddle as a mirroring of the black hole is taking in the reflected light.

This individual piece was in part informed by an exhibition of work in progress in which I was experimenting with carousel slide projectors installed in a gallery space. In May 2011 some of the images from *Outside of the Walls* were exhibited along with other investigative works. After hanging a group of prints, I noticed some holes in the

ceiling of the space. The holes had been made where light fittings had been moved around for different exhibitions to light work in different locations. I had been thinking of holes in relation my pictures of objects. Holes could be the opposites of photographed objects, or that which the object leaves behind. One of the holes was chosen and illuminated with a beam of light from a 35mm carousel slide projector (without projecting any image). Using a modified lens the hole was tightly framed to mimic the framing of the object in the accompanying pictures. The result of the installation was that it became uncertain if the visible hole was in fact a real hole, or the projection of an image of a hole, or even a moving image, which visitors to the exhibition would question whether something was going to happen. The individual piece described here and this sort of installation practice in general, rather than being further developed throughout the duration of the project, has more so informed my thinking about the activity of the pictures. The uncertainty of their illusion is called to mind, through a very simple “pointing to” something with light and the construction of this “portal” image has been directly influenced by the experience.



Penny, David. *Petard*. 2011. Installation view

As with the "portal" image, each of the objects in *Outside of the Walls* and *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals* is located centrally in the frame and the viewer is directed to consider the object. Not all can be described as being fully frontal with direct address to the viewer, but they all, more or less, face outwards away from their world and into the space of the viewer. Writing about the singularly isolated figures of Francis Bacon, Giles Deleuze suggests that the process of alienating the depicted subject 'avoid[s] the figurative, illustrative and narrative character the figure would necessarily have if it were not isolated' (Deleuze,

2003:6). The narrative potential for the represented figure is much greater than that of the object. Bryson also suggests that objects when viewed in the traditional still life painting lack a narrative potential and that in their temporal uncertainty, they become a threat to the subjectivity of the viewer (Bryson, 1990:64). To isolate objects then, doubly places these objects outside of graspable narrative, through their decontextualisation and separation.

For Deleuze narrative in picture making functions as a cliché, where '[a] cliché is a sensory-motor image of the thing' (Deleuze, 2005:19). The cliché functions to obstruct or resist a reading of a represented thing in its essence, instead a cliché provides a face through which the viewer is able to bring an already anticipated meaning, thus the image does not challenge the viewing subject in the same way as the "thing" would if revealed beyond the cliché. Deleuze's notion is developed through a reading of Henri Bergson, whereby an image is said to be perceived only partially by the viewer, the chosen part being a means to re-affirm personal economic interests, ideological interests and psychological demands (19-20).

Photography in general, read through Deleuze, would therefore function only in its normative manner as a document or copy of reality. One of the clichés of

photography would be its transparency, the assumption that the image it creates allows unprecedented perceptual access to a world that is always already past.

When there are photographs that avoid narrative, avoid names and avoid place, this layer of transparency is stripped back, and the thing as picture is revealed.

The isolated objects in these pictures become the initial object of attention but they are not alienated to the extent they become totally abstracted from any sense of space. Each is placed centrally within a framed environment and it is denial of any particular place that occurs. Yi Fu Tuan states '[w]hat begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value' (Tuan, 1977:6). Space becomes place the more it can be known. What these pictures do is show a relationship between an uncertain thing and an uncertain space. These two components of the image have agency upon each other, each affecting how the other is read. The pictures deny any sense of place, they do not allow the viewer to get to know them as such. The spatial relationship with the object is always changing; the objects seems bigger or smaller, what is solid matter, what is background and what is light and shadow seems uncertain. Space becomes difficult to pin down. With photography there is

always a search for meaning, an attempt to make sense of the referent, trying to make space into place, or an uncertain thing into known object. Knowing place is often a questioning of temporality – a latch onto historicity – which is denied in these pictures.

Jan Baetens writes that the professionalisation of photography, as a product of its incorporation into the academy and literary discourse has resulted in a view of photography as a largely temporal medium. This position asserts a relationship between time and looking back through photographs and the potential for photographs to call up stories for the viewer, creating what is suggested as a de-spatialisation of the medium:

Time, story, fiction: these three inextricably linked elements contradict rather bluntly the traditional vision of photography as a realist slice of space...the "natural" link between photography and space is at least interrupted by the literary scholarship on photography. This idea has been replaced by a much more temporal narrative, and even fictionalised vision (Baetens,

2007:65-66).

The de-spatialisation of the medium – through a literary postmodern turn – is suggested to have created opposition between the temporality of an image and its spatial characteristics. The essentialist rhetoric emphasising the spatial aspects of the photograph has been firmly contested and replaced. But, Baetens suggests there is a problem with this, causing 'an internal subdivision between two types of pictures' one 'temporal' and the other 'where this temporal dimension is simply not relevant' (63), which potentially re-introduces an essentialist separation between spatial and temporal/narrative based photographs. The images in this project are of the type of picture where temporality is not relevant; though they do still (and cannot help but) engage with language, in the viewers attempt to find words and knowledge of the object that is comfortable. Such an approach, as Baetens suggests, provides an interdisciplinarity that has come as a product of research through artistic practice and produces different and complementary views on the same 'object' rather than separate singular views through each disciplines own subject and its rhetoric. Baetens thoughts on interdisciplinarity support this project's approach to artistic research, the practice functions as

research, working to produce photographic works and critically examining its processes and artefacts, to enhance an understanding of photographic meaning. Analysis of pictures reveal how an engagement with an image is constructed and stylised to playfully exploit the critical and cultural awareness of existing knowledge, or expectations in relation to photographs of objects. This chapter has sought to position my own practice within the field that Demand and Sugimoto's is shown to be positioned. These different practices are visually and thematically different, but all occupy the conceptual space between object and image, capitalising on a transformation that appears to be absent.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF ENGAGEMENT

The short film *La Jetée* by Chris Marker is composed almost entirely of still black & white photographic images, sequenced and timed to construct the dystopian narrative of the film. In *Black and Blue* Carol Mavor writes that these 'images are so still that you believe you can enter them' (Mavor, 2012:12-13). Photographic images are of course always still compared to the moving image, though they can

also be considered to have a relative stillness. For example snapshot images, with the inclusion of movement as blur suggests motion more so than the composed portrait. Mavor's comment indicates that the reading of movement from an image needs to be reduced if the viewer is to believe they might get inside or onboard the image. Belief is important here when it comes to being incorporated into a picture. The picture must convince the viewer it is still enough to enter, whether it, or what it apparently represents are in motion or not. The pictures in this series are still, and with stillness there is also a slow and contemplative approach to looking. These slow and still pictures can be thought to be out of time and beyond any sense of temporal narrative.

If engagement is not with a communication of narrative then it is an encounter with the spatial aspect of the pictures. It is a rationalisation of space, measured against whatever has been determined by the viewer as the "factual" of the image, the judgement of a seemingly incidental mark or fragment of the image comes to be the anchor on which the remaining "text" of the picture is fabricated by the viewer. Another image from the *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals* series is presented below.



Penny, David. from the series *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals*. 2013.

The object used for this work is a damaged wing mirror, found shattered, as it now appears in its image, possibly being in this state as the result of a car crash. The object was likely to have been overlooked when the road had been cleared, in any case it was unwanted, unseen, insignificant and without function. I recall seeing the object on the ground as I cycled past it and remember my attention was drawn to it as a potential object to be photographed. It was the correct sort

of tabletop size and at first sight I was unsure about what it might be (or have been). As is usual, and described in my methodology, following collecting the object, it was taken home and stored, or rather taken into stock, temporarily displayed on different desks and surfaces around my home. And over a short time my attention would become more focussed on the object and how it might be seen when used to make a photograph.

The object is shown to be frontally presented, it is the most forward facing of all in the series, and I remember knowing that this would be how the object would be used almost immediately after collecting it. Through the frontal arrangement, the photograph ensures there is a direct encounter between the viewer and the object and a suggestion of mirroring is brought about through the plane the object lies upon being perpendicular to the plane upon which the viewer's gaze lies. The shattered fragments of mirrored glass, serving as another metaphor to expose the fallacy of transparency, indicate themselves as such through the differing highlight and shadow areas across the surface of the object. Also, when looking to the edge of the object, where the curve of its form turns slightly back away from the viewer and particularly to the top left edge, the three

dimensionality of these shards can be seen. Ordinarily a mirror appears as a flat planar surface, but upon breaking this surface, its dimensionality as object is revealed. This mirror has lost its form as reflective object that would show a singular, potentially infinite space, and is now a collection of objects presenting repeated and obscured reflections of the world through its splintered forms. The mirrored elements in the picture appear liquid like, but viscous, thick like treacle. Located at the middle of the object is a cyclopean eye, centrally marked out through the constellation of fragmented glass. It appears almost slightly recessed and convex, creating the sense of this part of the object as a single eye looking back towards the viewing subject. The eye also mimics the monofocality of the camera; a single, motionless lens, which prevents the ability to gauge perceptual depth as well as the possibility of looking around the object. Close inspection of the image reveals detail of the edge of the object containing (another frame) the fractured glass. This edge appears rough; it is not smooth and new and rather has nicks and grazes evident, which are most visible towards the top of the object. These flaws indicate the object as something used, battered and bruised, rather than a something ornament or decorative.

The picture is designed to draw the viewer into the image, to believe it can be entered. It might be assumed that once the viewer believes the image can be entered what the object is can really be determined, but this does not happen so readily. The pictorial space, created through each juxtaposition of object and environment defends the integrity of the photographed object, it is protected by the framed space and the condensation of its history into an aesthetic of the intra-ordinary. So there is a pull into the image, but the object then pushes back.

Another property of the appearance of the objects is that they seem inorganic; they are not made of living matter. Their medium is the hard stuff of glass, plastic, metal, stone and ceramic; materials from which new objects might be made. As types of objects their physicality and sense of materiality is not what would often be found in another object based representative practice; that of the traditional still life. Although the inorganic is sometimes found with the frame of the still life painting, it is representations of fruit, other foods and flowers that dominate the genre¹⁶. The symbolic significance of the organic, whose image would otherwise decay had it not been made into a painting is to remind the

¹⁶ see STERLING, C. 1981. *Still life painting : from antiquity to the twentieth century*, New York ; London, Harper & Row.

viewer of their own mortality and the fragility of their own body. A contemporary re-visiting of the themes and function of the still life painting is found in Sam Taylor Wood's *Still Life* (1991)¹⁷. This video sequence produced through time-lapse photography shows a bowl of fruit – standing in for the whole Nature Morte tradition – which slowly decays, developing mould and eventually withering away. Within the frame, as a marker of the contemporary is a Biro pen, which as would be expected, does not decay and performs the function of marking the form of the inorganic as temporally more stable than the organic objects. The stability of the pen might also connote the stability of that which the pen produces. Text, whether linguistic or pictorial, essentially outlives the body which produces it.

In *A Devouring Eye* (Richon et al., 2006) Olivier Richon makes a connection between the process of looking and the process of eating. He states,

¹⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIZXWGcb3u0>

the camera brings things closer and incorporates them. In this instance it is in the service of the mouth. Eye and mouth converge and assimilate what is outside (9).

The notion is that perceptual visual consumption operates parallel to physical oral consumption. Therefore what looks like it can be eaten is visually incorporated, psychically taken into the body, there becomes nourishment through what is considered visually. In contrast the objects in *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals* cannot be eaten any consumption of the monolithic might shatter the teeth, making more fragments, or cut the mouth, making more portals. The only thing that might be consumable is the soft cotton paper that the image is printed on; it is the photographic object rather than the photographed object that becomes the target of visual desire. Even so, the following passage as a reflection on one of the images in *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals* still managed to find the organic and consumable in the inorganic:



Penny, David. from the series *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals*. 2013.

A single object stands within the centre of the frame of the image. It is a column, it is tall, or at least much taller than it is wide or deep. There is a slightly angled position which allows me to see that it is a three dimensional object as I can see its width, depth and height and these proportions appear in the image to be clear, at a ratio of around 2:1:12 (w:d:h). I ask what it is and what is being shown to me. I want to first describe it as a chocolate bar, stood upon its end, but this makes me want to eat it and I move away from thinking what it is, beginning to taste its dark chocolate surface, its richness. The whole picture is also dark. There is a black space towards the top corners, there is nothing to see up there, but as I pass down the image the darkness subsides and I see texture in what looks like a black piece of

cloth. I can see now that the cloth provides both the background for the object and the ground on which it stands. The single thing in the frame is not a single thing then. There is also the surface it sits on and the background behind it; there is all that is around it. These are also things in the picture.

So it is a bar, it is a block and this is its form and its shape. The bar is a roughly geometric form, but looking closer, reveals texture, its front most facing surface, which is also orientated most towards the light, shows some visible signs of wear. This is definitely a used thing. There are distortions and effects present; evidence of its potential existence. A demonstration this object is not some conceptual, imaginary form. It was a real thing, and it is a real thing now, but has been made part of a photograph. The object in the photograph feels as though it has a textured freckled or blistered skin and there also some lighter marks, which could be scratches on its surface, or possibly additions to the original surface. I think more about this shape, it cannot be a chocolate bar, even though I have managed to taste it. It wouldn't stand up like this if it were. It is not practical. I think chocolate bars are not so flat on the bottom, so it would be likely to fall over. No, it is a skyscraper, a not-falling skyscraper, a tall standing building improbably teetering above whatever is below. But this quickly doesn't make sense either, there is nothing below. I know it couldn't be this; how would you photograph a skyscraper like this, unless it is a model, a real model of a building. Even so, I have tasted it as chocolate, felt its surface and seen it as skyscraper. What to

now?

There is a blurring of the senses in this analysis as vision moves between touch and taste, but the search for meaning is unable to comfortably consume. There is uncertainty in the reading of the work and moving from edible chocolate to tactile surface and impossible skyscraper is a circular contemplation of the image that is presented. The difficulty in deciphering relates to the stability of the form of the object and the perception that it will not decay. The object is out of time, it is inert and it is un-reactive. The idea that the photograph preserves the object doesn't need to apply here, as the object in this space is not going anywhere.

Richon writes that,

the genre of still life precisely deals with a mediation on time, as its subject matter is concerned with the preservation of what does not last, of what will become dead, rotten, excremental (16).

This practice of making *pictures of things*, rather than dealing with the moment of still life, engages with presentation (not preservation). Instead of being

living objects speaking of pastness, they can be thought of as dead objects speaking of presentness. This notion offers an alternative to the photographic referent as the original object, which here, as much as is possible is not allowed to assert its historicity.

A SPECTRUM OF PRACTICES WITHIN THE FIELD

Demand and Sugimoto, identified as making work that conceptually illustrates the opacity of the photograph rather than transparency, have been shown to operate within the field to which I am proposing my own practice similarly contributes. To recap, this research field is one where artists engage with a playful exploitation of a seemingly paradox of photography. It can be found in what might be considered quite varied types of photographic practice, all occupying the interstice of that paradox. The paradox in question is the ability of the photograph to be perceived as documentary evidence, while at the same time function as a catalyst for speculation and fantasy. Edward Weston's photographs of objects and his intentions for photographic practice are different to my own, in that the objects selected for photographs are not used to make the viewer

uncertain about what it is that has been photographed. There are similarities – a decontextualising space, sharp focus, attention to fine detail – but significantly the objects he photographed can be considered as an archetype of the indexical style previously discussed. His famous object based photography, began by making images of Nautilus shells and contributed to his exploration of natural forms alongside nude studies and landscape images. His collection of images of objects included the shells, but also fruits and vegetables; most notably peppers, through which he saw visual and formal parallels to the industrial architecture that modernism sought to depict and he suggested that through photographic description 'all basic forms are so closely related as to be visually equivalent' (Abbott et al., 2005:56). Weston sought to use photography both as a means to describe and transform everyday objects, stating that, '[a]nything that excites me, for any reason, I will photograph: not searching for unusual subject matter, but making the commonplace unusual' (60). The choice of object and arrangement as part of his process of making 'unusual', functions alongside a very descriptive use of the camera. The neutrality of the camera's lens served to interrogate what else might be made from a descriptive quality – 'this then: to photograph a rock, but be more than a rock. Significant representation – not interpretation' (Weston and

Bunnell, 1983:61) – The singular viewpoint of the camera, which might be assumed to limit the potential to fully explore an object, in fact, opens the possibility for imaginative exploration. In Weston's work the more simple the representation of an object is made, the more it has potential to be seen as something else. His extensive personal accounts of thoughts about photographic practice reveal a sort of tuned in negotiation of the final image from the scene presented. He writes that,

one must prevision and feel, BEFORE EXPOSURE, the finished print – complete in all the values, in every detail – when focussing upon the camera ground glass. Then the shutter's release fixes for all time this image, this conception, never to be changed by afterthought, by subsequent manipulation. The creative force is released coincident with the shutter's release.

There is no substitute for amazement felt, significance realized, at the TIME of EXPOSURE (Weston and Bunnell, 1983:62). [original emphasis]

Weston's huge emphasis on the moment of exposure illustrates his view that this was the point of transfer of some kind of essence of the thing into the film, which he thought made photography in the right hands (and minds) important as an artistic medium. Weston's pictures of objects function to bury the paradox, which the spectrum of practices being considered here employ as a characteristic of their art and engage the viewer. Here the paradox is revealed to the viewer quietly and slowly. In contrast there are works that should be placed at the fringes of this field but that still participate in exploitation of the paradox, but these are clear and open in their intention to play with the viewer. The work of Ed Ruscha involves a subversion of the photograph's use as a document. Using the photograph as conceptual art, it functions with a documentary style – used as an appearance of record taking and factual account rather than embody the photographer's expressive desires. The everyday subject matter appearing not to have any aesthetic value, questions the notion of what is worth photographing; what is important. In relation to his book *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963) the work documents what its title suggests, making use of a deadpan style to distance the photographer from the subject matter. The selection of images avoids theatricality as well as narrative and any sense of the photographer as

anything other than an objective reporter. Silvia Wolf points out that in the editing process,

he took out several that he felt were out of character with others in composition and design [in one photograph] raking light casts long shadows that lend an uncharacteristic drama to the image. In another picture deep muddy tire tracks in the foreground, coupled with a car on the left contribute to a narrative in the piece (Wolf, 2004:120).

This knowing construction of a *more* documentary style image, engages with the photograph as an ironic version of itself. Ruscha himself states that, instead of going out and calling a gas station "art", I'm calling its photograph art,' he remarked. 'But the photograph by itself doesn't mean anything to me; it's the gas station that's important to me (Barendse, 1981:9). Here the photograph is a sort of ready-made that requires a conceptual link between the documentary status of the image and whatever is being photographed. The ironic potential of the photograph's assumption as document reinforced through the context of

presentation is further exploited in *Royal Road Test* (1967). The book attentively documents the event and result of a typewriter being thrown from a window on a return trip from Las Vegas. But it is the seriousness of presentation of the photographic and descriptive textual material, which comes across with the clarity of a scientific report that plays with notion of photographs assumed objectivity.

An additional contrast to both Weston's indexical style and Ruscha's documentary style might a style of estrangement deployed by Alexander Rodchenko. The motivation for confusing the viewer, producing a desire to question what is considered pictorially "normal" is ideologically concerned in this photographic work. Adopting the aesthetic of "ostranenie" or *making strange*, developed through Russian Futurism, photographs were made from vantage points and using compositions which were seen to challenge the normal mode of pictorial engagement. The birds-eye and worms-eye view were particular strategies to activate the viewer's consciousness, creating images that distorted the geometric appearance of objects and played with their sense of scale. Simon Watney suggests that the theorisation of "ostranenie" by Viktor Shklovsky is 'rooted in an aesthetic dimension, which was to be strongly reinforced by the whole body of

Formalist literary criticism' (Watney, 1982:161), the technique thus sought to produce an aesthetic specific to photography, differentiating it from painting. The view points that could be pictured through the fast exposure of the cameras lens were just not practically possible with paint and canvas and broke from what was thought to be a passively, habitually consumed conventional perspective. Watney suggests that

[h]abitualisation is understood by Shklovsky as an effect of dulled perceptions, perceptions which have been clouded by routine, by culture. His analysis is thus very much more concerned with ideological dimensions of everyday life (160).

The visual process of making strange was thus connected to awakening a perception of the social space within the viewer; aesthetics becoming identified with revolution as 'a theory of culture which was implacably hostile to hegemonic values of capitalist society' (163) Visually strange photographs thus activated the viewers engagement with the object of photography as well as the social dimension it existed within. As Watney suggests,

the entire theory of defamiliarisation rested upon an unquestioned acceptance of the fallacy which assumes that photographs objectively reflect a given, adequate and fully comprehensible world of appearances (175).

This primarily ideologically motivated practice, can here be thought to question the significance of its aesthetic presentation, through a medium considered as having a connection to reality, which in turn questions what is going on in that reality.

In what can be seen as an inversion of Weston's pictures, Talia Chetrit's photographic practice utilises objects and is principally studio based. She makes what appear to be simple photographs of elegantly composed objects (and also the body) that subvert the codes of this type of studio practice photograph and their anticipated reading. Upon reflecting on her work, she expresses an interest in the complicated relationship between photography and reality.

I'm interested in how reality can be translated and how that reality can become disorientating through the medium of photography... a manipulation that is often disguised as a reproduction... a permanent record of something that never existed (Perlson, 2012:online).



Chetrit, Talia. *Drip Vase*. 2011. - 50,8 x 40,6

Although the camera cannot help record what is put before it, there is potential for that scene to be constructed and arranged in order to disrupt a straightforward 'normal', or transparent and descriptive reading of an object, therefore creating a visual space, which is a product of the artist's construction of the scene. Chetrit's act of inverting the image of the two vases calls to questions

the transparency of photographic representation. The vase image certainly relates to the precedent set by those such as Weston but this takes up a more playful use of the frame and its manipulation. There is no disputing that when looking at such work, we are looking at a photograph of an object, or objects, and those objects are no longer present; although it could also be said we are looking at an object that is solely present in the photograph.

Similarly to Chetrit, the contemporary photographic artist Elad Lassry makes many studio-based photographs of objects, though the methods used to print, frame and install the works in the gallery space, move his practice into a realm that expands notions of the photographic medium. He says that his pictures are 'sculptures that happen to be photographs' also suggesting there is a 'nervousness' to this position, as though the pictures themselves are uncertain of their identity. He calls these works 'picture-objects', which at the very least foregrounds the materiality of the photograph as being an object itself, but such a conceptual position also throws up an awkward hierarchical question about pictures of things. Lassry says that his practice 'raises the question of whether the work's existence is image-based or object-based, or whether it can be both'

(Godfrey, 2011:92). Perhaps Lassry is suggesting the work could be object-based because he is dealing with objects and their arrangement when making a construction that is to be photographed. Perhaps it is image-based because he is making pictures of those constructions. But, it might also be considered object-based because as the end result he chooses to make a photograph that hangs on a wall and is an object like any other. More significantly, the work could be considered both object-based and image-based, as through making the photograph, the thing might actually change into a state where it is perceived as something else; a new object, that did not exist before the image was made and viewed. Lassry's use of framing extends this last idea of the 'picture-object'.

Coloured frames, matching the colour of the content of the image, extend the image space, so image and frame work together in an iconic pictorial-sculptural form. In addition the description and titling of the image state the depth of the framed object, placing the epistemology of the indexical photograph in doubt and the work becoming a type of sculpture.



Lassry, Elad. *Four Braids (Blue)*. 2012. - 36.8 x 29.2 x 3.8 cm

Both Lassry and Chetrit, utilise objects in their practice to make what are essentially straight photographs. Though compared to Weston, motivations for practice move away from an engagement with the directness and transparency of the photographic window to a position which sees the frame, not as a means to access images of the world, but to a space which Chris Wiley suggests is a box 'inside of which the world is arranged.' (Wiley, 2011:88). The photograph as a box functions analogously for the changes in the types of space where photographic works are made. Conceptual practices, influenced by a documentary aesthetic, like

that of the Bechers¹⁸ or the unapparent constructions of Jeff Wall's tableaux¹⁹, work on the principle of gathering and assimilating images from "out there", whereas looking at something like Fiscilli and Weiss' *Quiet Afternoon*²⁰, or Lassry's still life pictures refer to the "in here" of the artist's studio. Works that focus on the materiality of the photographic object and the formal components of the photographic, often employing cameraless techniques similarly refer back to another box, that of the interior space of the darkroom; both practices can be seen as a contemporary opposition to the documentary tradition of photography²¹. The studio, constructed or otherwise, is an internal space and in being away from the outside and exterior world it can be thought to function as though it is an experimental laboratory. Internality is mirrored by the psychological engagement required to look at these works, becoming a space where the photographed object is borne from its image. Objects used in photographs are of course already present in the world, but they can at the same

¹⁸ see BECHER, B., BECHER, H. & ZWEIFEL, A. 2004. *Typologies*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.

¹⁹ see BURNETT, C. & TATE GALLERY. 2005. *Jeff Wall*, London, Tate Publishing.

²⁰ see FLECK, R., SÖNTGEN, B. & DANTO, A. C. 2005. *Peter Fischli, David Weiss*, London New York, Phaidon. pp. 19,66-71

²¹ for an introduction to cameraless and darkroom based photographic practices see REXER, L. 2009. *The edge of vision : the rise of abstraction in photography*, New York, NY, Aperture.

time be brought into the world through their image. The notion of invention and creating a new object through the photographic "document" has enabled consideration of potential interactions between photography and sculpture. This in no way is suggesting that photographs of objects overcome some metaphysical boundary and reconfigure themselves as three-dimensional objects, but it is useful to consider the relationship between a photographically presented object, its background (which is also an object) and the surface of the print, which is a "flat", but nevertheless spatial object. Such practices explore an expanded notion of the photograph, as well as questioning its ontological status.

Sculpture and photography have historically intertwined through artistic practices involving the use of the photographic print to make three-dimensional works.

There are many examples of this type of work potentially starting with Peter Bunnell's 1970 MoMA show *Photography into Sculpture* being a collection of 52 works by American and Canadian artists, which sought to 'embrace a new kind of photography in which many of the imaginary qualities of the picture, particularly spatial complexity, have been transformed into actual space and dimension, thereby shifting photography into sculpture' (Bunnell, 1993:164). It is relevant to

note that the show has recently been re-presented in 2011 at the Cherry and Martin Gallery with most of the original works and a forthcoming publication featuring a new interview with Bunnell²². The re-visiting of this landmark exhibition might indicate a re-invigorated interest in dialogues between the disciplines and recent published editions of *Sculpture* magazine, *Frieze* and *The British Journal of Photography*, similarly indicate such interests.²³

The 2008 exhibition *Truthiness: Photography as Sculpture* also indicates a contemporary interest in works that investigate the sculptural potential of the photographic print. The show presents 'a landscape of straightforward, three-dimensional photographic fictions... [which have] progressed from image to object to scenes that occupy time and space' (Wagley, 2008). Geoffrey Batchen, writing about these sorts of practices interrogates the idea that boundaries between media are porous (absorbing one another), naming them 'post-photography'. What is called photographic, now encompasses artistic practices that are 'after but not yet beyond photography' (Batchen, 2001:109). He suggests

²² see <http://www.cherryandmartin.com/exhibitions/96>

²³ see *Sculpture* Magazine September 2011, Vol. 30, no.7, *Frieze* issue 143, Nov-Dec 2011, *British Journal of Photography* March 2012, Volume 159, Issue no. 7798

artists are looking to find new ways that photography can come to be a medium of expression, questioning the ontology of the photograph in relation to other media like sculpture or painting, whilst remaining tethered to a photographic discourse. Such works can be said to take a different approach to the linguistic or narrative constructions of meaning in photographs, to a process of exploring both the material substrate of the photographic and the "behind the scenes" practices that go into making photographs.

Bunnell's *Photography into Sculpture* was taken and inverted for a 1987 show at the Walker Arts Centre in Minneapolis. *Cross References: Sculpture into Photography* presented the work of James Casebere, Bruce Charlesworth, Beranrd Faucon, Ron O'Donnell, Sandy Skoglund and Boyd Webb, all artists making large scale (room sized) sculptures specifically to be photographed. The introduction to the catalogue suggests that '[t]hese artist have little or no interest in photography of visual fact; rather, they prefer to arrange events to create their own realities.'(Casebere et al., 1987:4). In this instance, these dramatic and often spectacular works were presented in the gallery, as sculptural objects as well as the accompanying photographs. The intention here was to reveal the process

behind the work and for 'viewers to have the opportunity to see how these artists use the camera to transform three-dimensional subject matter into two dimensions' (4). Curatorially, this juxtaposition of object and image, appears to simply to highlight the theatrical spectacle and scale of these work for the audience in a large public gallery institution, but I feel undermines the potential of the agency of the photograph in these artists works. Only Faucon chose to use the invitation to place object *alongside* image as a conceptual interrogation – through practice – of the work that the photograph does in transforming the sculptures each of these artists produce. *The Wave of Snow* is a large glass case filled with sugar crystals, which was placed in the space with existing photographs from the series *Rooms of Love* (1984-1986). The installation appears as a 'crystalline snowdrift' (18), creating an environment that for Faucon parallels the photographic: 'when you shoot the real, you are shutting it [in], in an analogic way; but now I want to shut [in] the real scene, in a literal way.' (19) Here the world becomes cased in and tantalisingly, physically unreachable. To directly reveal the sculptural works along with their photographs, as the other artists chose to, only illustrates the awe inspiring transformative process. Faucon's gallery intervention instead questions this transformation his sculpture operating the

same way the photograph does.

David Green's paper *Between Object and Image* (Green, 1999) seeks to historically position such hybrid practices as a succession from the performance and Land Art practices of the 1960's that challenged modernism's traditional notions of medium specificity by using the photograph as a document of the artistic event, action or gesture. Robert Smithson, Gordon Matta-Clark and Robert Morris are cited here as challengers of the concept of sculpture as traditional form or unique permanent object, shifting the conception of sculpture as a making of space.

Green states,

more than merely using unconventional materials as the means of making sculpture, these works were concerned with a more complex concept of space involving a dialectic between what is here and what is elsewhere and between ideas of presence and absence (262).

The photographs made by these artists, are largely seen as documentation of

temporary sculptural works. But Green suggests these "documents" are underestimated, questioning the spatial experience and the temporality of the experience of the object when seen through the photograph. Although these documents do record moments that took place in front of the camera they 'record ... a particular visual configuration in a particular location at a particular time. However viewed at another moment in time [through the photographic] we perceive something different.' Green goes on to suggest that this act of viewing the photograph not as a document of an event but as a new, sculptural (making of space) experience could bring about an experience of the 'fictional present' (267). Green finishes by saying that,

as it becomes detached from its status as visual document, and is forced to abandon its representational function, photography must find for itself a new relationship to the real and a new objectivity of and for itself (268).

Perhaps, in the same way the conceptualist Land Art practices discussed in Green's paper sought to de-materialise the art object through the use of the

photograph as an active documentation²⁴, a contemporary incorporation of sculptural tendencies or even simply a conceptual engagement with construction for the sake of photography seem to wish to re-materialise the photographic object, where making space is today often associated with a bodiless virtual environment. There is something to be said here which aligns with what could be considered a return to ideas associated with photographic modernism – of the frame of the photograph as a space to construct and arrange compositions – but here there seems to be a compositional and arrangement practice that rather than being influenced by a descriptive essentialism, works take advantage of a world where images and things are increasingly at the boundary between real and virtual space. Artist's like Lassry and Chetrit, seek to expand the territory of photography beyond its ability to make an image, whilst maintaining its status as just that – just an image.

²⁴ See also LIPPARD, L. R. 1997. *Six years : the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*, Berkeley, University of California Press.

PART TWO

AFFECTIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

In their central and isolated location these objects are put up front, the object is dominant within the space of the picture; it is calling to the viewer; the form of the picture creating the desire to engage. The single, central object is enchanting; it pulls the viewer in, suggesting there is nothing else to look at and contemplate. The viewer is not asked to consider the cliché of what the photograph describes. The viewer is asked to consider the space of the picture. Initially pulling the viewer in, the object then pushes away, and the viewer engages with the notion of *The Front*. *The Front* of the photograph would be its constructed masquerade as a representation of the real whilst simultaneously engaging with its physical (frontal) surface. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, in the introduction to their edited volume *Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (2004) suggest that through the more recent engagement with the photograph as an object,

there has been a reworking of the "window on the world" approach to thinking about photography. While the cultural construction of that window is now fully recognised the concern with the indexical has nevertheless dominated writing on photographs (6).

Photographic surface and with it, opacity, is additional to the perceptual possibility of reaching the referent. In this work it is ink on paper, producing an object in itself. Artist and writer Hito Steyerl suggests, 'if [photographic] identification is to go anywhere, it has to be with this material aspect of the image, with the image as a thing, not as representation' (Steyerl, 2010:online). Here identification is not recognition but a lack of understanding of what the image shows. She continues 'And then it perhaps ceases to be identification, and instead becomes participation' (online). A movement from identification to participation engages with a shift in perspective and is related to this project. There is an oscillation between pulling into and pushing away from the image as representation, the photograph also fluctuates around being a document of a thing, to thing itself. Participation in the photograph as picture, as thing itself, is

to see it as a material thing, as Steyerl suggest 'it is matter like you and me' (online).

Theories of affect have recently seen attention within photographic studies. The notion of affect can be seen as an alternative to scholarship that has tended to focus on photography's effect, which Jill Bennett describes in terms of

a response as one in which the viewer is inhabited by an "embodied sensation" and is "stricken with affect," where affect is, according to her definition, "a process of 'seeing feeling' where feeling is both imagined and regenerated through an encounter with the artwork (Bennett, 2005, in Bassnett, 2009:242)

With the editors of a special edition of the Journal *Photography & Culture* stating that,

the term 'affect' describes a concept that rests on the frontier between the mental and somatic... affect has emerged as a

productive site of inquiry for understanding how we perceive
disparate phenomena, including visual images. Indeed, affect,
emotion, and feelings share a special affinity with photography
(Phu and Steer, 2009:237).

Much of the use of a theory of affect is in relation to photographs of, or a
product of traumatic events and experiences. In her book of the same name
Ariella Azoulay invokes a *Civil Contract of Photography* (Azoulay, 2008). Azoulay's
theory aims to motivate a shift in the ontology of photography in a more recent
essay she states that,

[t]he photograph is usually thought of as the finished product of
an event which has been concluded. In contradistinction to this
common assumption, I see the photograph – or the knowledge
that a photograph has been produced – as an additional factor in
the unfolding of the event of photography (not of the
photographed event). The encounter with the photograph
continues the event of photography which happened elsewhere

(Azoulay, 2011:75).

Further to this and more useful to this project, Justin Carville suggests that Azoulay's notion of a viewers "contract" with a photograph, might,

as theoretical concept, addresses itself to the entirety of the photographic field: from the technologies of photographic production and the chemical and digital processes of reproduction and distribution, to the interrelations between photographer, the photographed, and viewer (Carville, 2010:355).

Thus the photograph in art practice – similarly produced with the future engagement of the viewer in mind – also enters into some sort of contract. Laura Levin, in her reading of Azoulay, states that the photograph 'exceeds the status of testimony or evidence by calling for action on the part of the viewer' (Levin, 2009:329). Levin asserts that the notion of an affective photography positions the image as performative – taking ideas from J.L Austin's 1955 lecture *How to do things with words* (Austin et al., 1975) in which Austin articulates a difference

between 'constative' and 'performative' utterances. The former is a statement that 'describes' something, and the later, through the saying of the word actually 'performs' an action; the mere utterance of words constitutes the performance of the action those words announce. For example: by saying, "I promise", the action of promising is fulfilled with no further, physical action required to promise. The affective image as performative image could also be one that does not simply describe something; it is one made with awareness and attention to its future participation with the viewer as artwork; the intention to affect the viewer in some way. Although the use of such ideas have been restricted to use in social and cultural aspects of photograph, it is also possible to see connections to recent statements related to art photography. What is significant is that the photograph is re-invested with agency; it is considered active as a material entity.

PICTURES OF THINGS AND THINGS THAT ARE PICTURES

In this section I wish to present a focussed critical rationale for seeing my "pictures of things" also as *things* themselves – and that the iteration of the object in these works is significant and relevant to an enhancement of our

understanding of photography's relationship with the real and the ontology of the photograph itself. The technological and interconnected cultural impact of digital media on photographic practice and the theorisation of it and its product is also considered significant to such a rationalisation.

The pictures made within this project are designed so certainty is resisted as the viewer's interrogation of the work rebounds inside of the frame of the picture.

The appearance of objects in the pictures and the space around them, constructed as an aesthetic of the intra-ordinary (the descriptive photograph, imbuing the object with a sense of shrouded significance) can be better considered as "things" than objects. Historically, the consideration of the photograph as indexical sign has rendered the photographic object as perceptually transparent. Post-modern critics promoting the notion of the photographic sign being based in language, outside of the photograph itself, see that it is subjectivity which constructs the photograph, largely ignoring the physical support of the image. There is now also a "material turn" to take account of, which aims to strip back these cultural layerings of metaphorical and perceptual invisibility, making the photographic surface opaque and unavoidable

as an object in itself.

The "material turn" in photographic studies has come out of an increase in anthropology's interest in material culture, identified by Edwards and Hart, who cite works from Daniel Miller (Miller, 1987, Miller, 1997)²⁵ suggesting that,

[i]n anthropology, Miller ... has argued for discussions of artefacts to be explicitly separated from linguistic models ...Instead, material cultural analysis, proceeding from an anthropological position of direct observation, allows us to question ingrained assumptions concerning the superiority of language over other forms of expression, such as visual/material forms, and constitutes objects as important bridges between mental and physical worlds (Edwards and Hart, 2004:4).

The need to find an alternative to (more established) linguistic models and a notion of bridges between mental and physical worlds resonates with the themes

²⁵ See also MILLER, D. 2005. *Materiality*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press ; Chesham : Combined Academic [distributor].

of this practice but also with those in other (in addition to Edwards and Hart) recent photography literature. From a history of photography perspective, Geoffrey Batchen, in his book *Burning With Desire* (Batchen, 1997a) identifies that the post-modern scholars – pointing out Burgin, Sekula, Tagg and Solomon-Godeau as examples – ‘shift in analytic focus from image to frame, from questions of form and style (the rhetoric of art) to questions of function and use (the practice of politics)’ (5-12). The dominance in the 1970’s and 1980’s of critical attention for the image in the photograph, over the object of photography has engendered an attention for the material nature of the medium. If Baetens earlier statement is re-considered – that spatialisation should accompany and complement literary scholarship on photography in an interdisciplinary approach – I would suggest that it is logical that, the sculptural consideration considered in the last section of part one might become activated. It also follows that from a sculptural consideration of photography, materiality is engendered as a critical perspective. Batchen’s *Post-Photography* (Batchen, 2001) explores photographic practice that knowingly moves beyond the image shown by the photograph into the pseudo-sculptural territory discussed earlier and similarly, Edwards and Hart state that the central rationale of their book ‘is that a photograph is a three-

dimensional thing, not only a two-dimensional image' (1). This cross-disciplinary turn in material culture to a consideration of the physical nature of things is suggested by W.J.T. Mitchell as 'a compensatory move for the sense of de-realization produced by cyberspace and virtual reality' (Mitchell, 2005:111). Such an assertion considered in relation to photographic images connects and contributes to the debate about photography's fragile theoretical relationship with the real as discussed in the literary review accompanying this thesis. As a response, approaching these pictures with a consideration of matter and materiality assists in dissolving the boundary between the real and the virtual, object and subject, further contributing and complicating to the notion of the photograph as an generative device.

This indeterminate quality of the photograph, being both an image and an object seems well suited to being a "thing". The notion of thinghood and its potential suitability to describe the deliberately elusive character of the object in and of the photograph can be articulated through Bill Brown's *Thing Theory*, in which he states:

The word designates the concrete yet ambiguous within the everyday: "Put that green thing in the hall." It functions to overcome the loss of words or as a placeholder for some future specifying operation: "I need that thing you use to get at the things between your teeth." It designates an amorphous characteristic or a frankly irresolvable enigma... [T]hings is a word that tends especially at its most banal to index a certain limit or liminality, to hover over the threshold between the nameable and unnameable, the figurable and the unfigurable, the identifiable and the unidentifiable (Brown, 2001:140-141).

This idea of things is appropriate to these works, the objects in the pictures are not abstractions, they are definite objects, but once photographed they can also be seen as some other thing, a thing that is in a picture. The works also deal with a contention between objects and images. There is the world of the image, which is about representation, and there is the world of the object, which is about materiality and physicality, in this work both are necessary, they are enmeshed in an oscillation between artefact and image, produced through the viewer and their

attention to the picture as an object and the pictured thing as both a representational image and the original object that was before the camera.

In recent essays Nina Lager Vesterburg (Lager Vestberg, 2008) and Julia Breitbach (Breitbach, 2011) suggest that the consideration of photographs as things is part of the "material turn", in part, a result of the work of Edwards and Batchen. Breitbach pointing out Batchen reminds us,

that the image is also an object and that simulation is inseparable from substance. More important, we are made to behold the *thingness* of the visual – its thickness, the tooth of its grain – even as we simultaneously encounter the *visuality* of the tactile – its look, the piercing force of its perception (61).

I consider this notion of "things" to be particularly relevant to my work and its practice of using objects to make photographs, furthermore the work's specific engagement with thinghood contributes to the ontological uncertainty of photography itself.

As identified in the review of literature, the theoretical territory of critical photographic studies is and always has been unstable and shifting. The inclusion of digital technology in the debate – through scholars such as William Mitchell, W.J.T Mitchell, Manovich, Ritchen and Walden – further complicates matters. It can certainly be said that the incorporation of digital technology to photography raises questions, doubts, fears or anxieties about the medium, which can be separated into two strands:

- The real – the continued debate around photography's relationship with reality
- Materiality – the anxiety over immaterial nature of the coded file and tendency of screen-based engagement

Though both aspects have arguments for against any radical significance. The simple addition of these debates to the already broad discourse opens further space for artistic interstice. This practice and the work it has produced is proposed as one that is located within such space. In addition the work functions

as such specifically through its intra-ordinary character.

Brown's suggestion of "things" as being at 'the threshold between the nameable and unnameable, the figurable and the unfigurable, the identifiable and the unidentifiable' seems very appropriate for the photograph today. The photographic image might potentially exist as: the darkroom print, the inkjet print, the direct print onto any solid surface, the image on screen – on a computer, laptop, tablet, smart phone – or the projected image. There is an interconnected and productive relationship between the notion of the photograph as "thing" and the ever increasingly complicated question of "what is a photograph?" Once the photograph itself is acknowledged as a "thing" – through establishing the significance of digital – the poignancy of the [still life] object in the image is activated as another indeterminate "thing" (the intra-ordinary is designed to construct the representation of the object as indeterminate) and thus adds to the ongoing debate of photography's relationship with the real, which in turn must refer back to digital culture. So it is the combined critical engagement with the thingness of the photograph as an object, together with the specificity of this practice – to make strange the image

of the object – that assists our understanding of the photograph's ontology.

The double thinghood of these photographic works has ceased upon the marginal physicality that has slowly pulled itself into critical and cultural consciousness. Batchen suggests,

in order to see what the photograph is "of" we must first suppress our consciousness of what the photograph "is" in material terms (Batchen, 1997b:2).

Though to consider Batchen's statement in reverse, which would mean suppressing what the photograph is "of" in order to see what it "is", still means the "of" creeps through. They are always at odds, each becoming marginal as culture shifts consciousness.

Brown's thing theory is also useful for thinking about the viewer's engagement with the particular subjects of my work. He suggests that things, as they are not objects, resist theory. Being between the nameable and un-nameable means the

thing in the picture cannot be objectified and resists the subjectivity of the viewer. There is always an attempt but objectification is not suitably realised. W. J. T. Mitchell, specifically in relation to images, also considers a notion of things to be significant in this respect, stating:

Objects are the way things appear to a subject – that is, with a name, an identity, a gestalt or stereotypical template, a description, a use or function, a history, a science... the thing appears as the nameless figure of the Real that cannot be perceived or represented. When it takes on a single, recognisable face, a stable image, it becomes an object, when it destabilises... it becomes a hybrid thing (Mitchell, 2005:156).

This single recognisable face is what the intra-ordinary is constructed to try to avoid, to divert the viewer from a comfortable and controlled objectification to instead being faced with the thing as stable, authoritative figure. Brown suggests of things that, '[t]heir force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence,

the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems' (141). To make photographs *of things*, whilst at the same time promoting photographs *as* things charges them with such irrational significance. The totemic nature of the monolithic forms I have been making pictures of engaged with this idea discussed of framing in the first section of part one; suggesting the particular framing functioned to somehow mark the represented object with significance.

In respect of these works double thinghood, I have suggested there is a iteration of objecthood from the pictorial qualities of the object represented, into the photograph as an object itself. In addition, that materiality might also be a quality transferable in the opposite direction; from the physical print into the pictorial space. An interpretation of materiality, as the manipulation of those material qualities described and pictured by the image, would be the psychic manipulation of the object, its potential transformation in scale, its dimensionality and a sense of the space around the object. Consider the following image from *Fragments*,

Monoliths, Portals:



Penny, David. from the series *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals*. 2013.

The presence of the table-top horizon allows for a judgement of space behind the object relative to the size of the object, though is important to note that the object's size may not be determined. The cube type object sits on what looks like a square tile, but is this a wall tile, a carpet tile, or just an arbitrary sized piece of board? The horizon line behind the object pictorially bisects the cube, passing through the front facing panel and producing a contained, framed division of two

differing grey spaces. I am able to recall the seascapes of Hiroshi Sugimoto in this space, particularly the darker images in the series.



Sugimoto, Hiroshi. *Aegean Sea, Pilon*. 1990.

The condensed framed space also repeats the entire space of the picture, but with an absence of objects within it. The miniaturised frame within a frame provides both transparency, seeing through and behind the object as well as visually producing the opacity of a pictorial surface (exaggerated by the dust on

the surface of the glass); doubling the division of ground and background. The new space, the frame within the frame, provides a conception of this working practice in general, as though the image is stripped back to the empty tabletop and it is waiting for a picture to be made. These assessments of the image and its things are also related to an interpretation of materiality. The light in this image here clearly originates from the right side of the picture. A dull deep shadow is cast across the plane of the picture passing beyond the edge of the frame to the left of the cube object. This extends the presence of the object outside of the frame, beyond what can possibly be seen. Light is also reflecting off the object directed diagonally forwards to the viewer. Light floats in space, it is ephemeral and on the verge of dissolving in the top right of the picture. This is a strange smudge that filters into the frame from an undetermined source. It appears flat like a painted surface but also as an apparition in space, between the visible background and the front surface of the image. The viewer becomes witness to moments of the action of light, as though vision is scientific, slowing down the world and making the invisible and transient feel physical and material. These image and the rest in this series are not abstract, real space is always visible, only through the viewers engagement it is not the space of reality.

HOW TO FRAME A THING

To close this thesis the following will discuss how the works made within

Fragments, Monoliths, Portals are (literally) framed as part of their installation.

Brown writes that the force of things is through sensuous *or* metaphysical presence. Here, these *Pictures of Things* – with their double thinghood – take on both at the same time. Their particular affect being a result of this simultaneous emanation of uncertainty. Metaphysically, the intra-ordinary dictates a design of specific formal qualities of the object – sturdy, static, forceful, prominent – the framing and singularity creates a space that alienates the object as it is photographed, impeding visual relation to other objects or any sense of place.

The lighting of objects places them in plain sight, whilst also creating suspense as though they withhold their identity. Sensual properties of these works as things, comes through their particular method of presentation. A hybrid analogue/digital process used to make each work allows the possibility for experimentation with the print media. A visibly soft and smooth cotton rag paper has been selected to

invite the viewer's projected tactile engagement. In relation to such psychic engagement, Elizabeth Edwards suggests that,

as photographs become active sensory interfaces between referent and viewer, there is a perceptual movement between touching to see and seeing to touch to the extent that touch enables seeing, in a way bringing about a blurring of the iconic, indexical and material aspects of the photograph. In this context the integral relationships between seeing photographs and touching the referent are played out at the surface of the image (Edwards, 2009:43).

The paper is selected to enhance the dissolution – operating in the boundary between fantasy and reality – between seeing the pictured thing, seeing the surface of the print, touching the surface of the print and touching the pictured thing.

The 'sensuous presence' of the printed photographic thing is then offered to the

viewer through a particular framing methodology that has been conceptual designed as a product of realisations gradually achieved in this project.

Throughout the latter stages of the project, I have been experimenting with prints at around 16" x 20", which is four times the size of the exposed negative. This choice of size was initially intuitive and appropriate for a working process, it simply felt suitable to see sufficient reproduction of detail in the prints. The intra-ordinary process specifically requires the objects are not necessarily reproduced life size in the image – as a part of their potential to deceive the viewer in relation to their scale compared to the real – and in this respect the print size could have been quite arbitrary. As the project continued there was a sense that the screen at which I worked on the images was around the same size as the working prints I had made. Test prints were made at smaller, roughly 10"x 8", and larger, at around 20" x 24", though a final size of 465mm x 385mm has been decided. Each photograph is printed and framed at the same size and is intended to be read as a series.

The choice to make the final work at a size informed by the screen on which they were (resolutely) produced, might in part be a result of the filtering of a digital

context into the practice. In an essay titled *Waving Flags*, referencing semaphore as a practice of visually based communication, Nick Warner writes of an current interest amongst artists in the two-dimensional as a product 'of an era in which we transpose physicality into the virtual, and interact with it via *surface*' (Warner, 2013:122). This points to the increased use of the screen and the virtual space it provides as a mediation of, and interaction with images as representations of the real, predominantly through devices such as smart phones, tablets, computer screens and satellite navigation systems. Our engagement with these spaces and the plethora of information – visual and otherwise – many people carry around with them on a day-to-day basis is rooted in the photographic. There is a folding of the photographic into the notion of the screen, which must incorporate a consideration of the materiality of photography within this new digital context for the photograph. Warner writes that,

[w]hen printed on paper the photograph is an object, and takes on a materiality, yet one of such fragility and insignificance that it borders on immaterial; only a scientist would describe a sheet of paper as three-dimensional. Paradoxically, it is in their

translation to the screen that photographs have taken on this

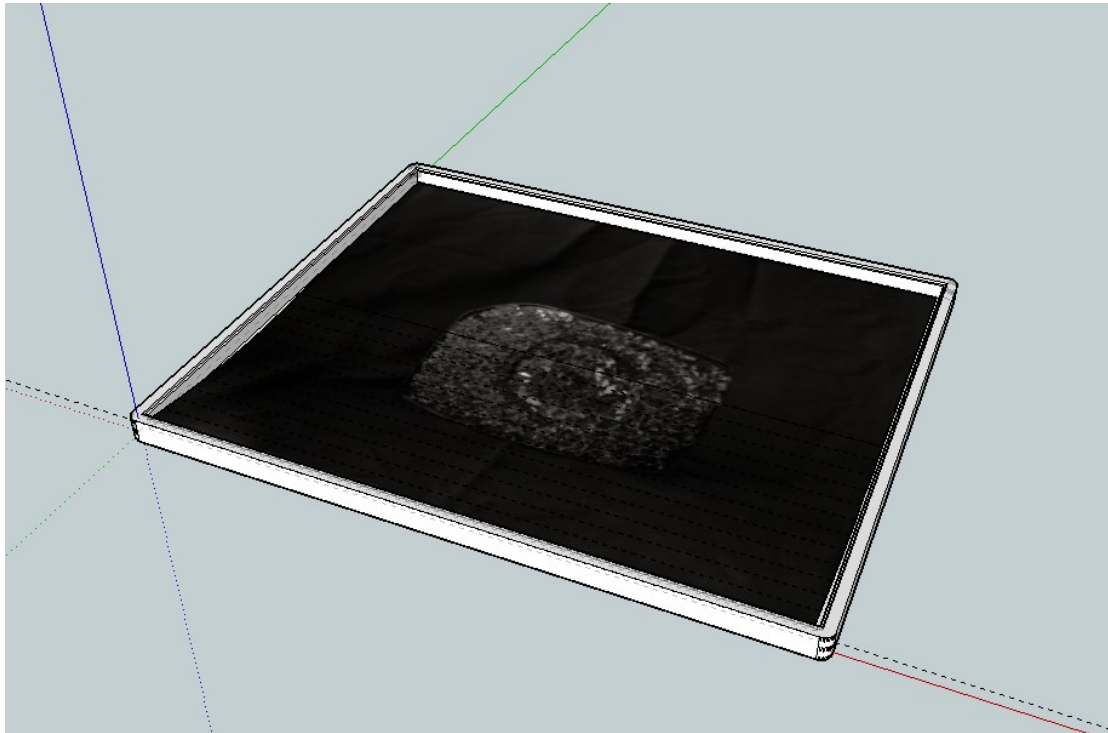
increased *objectness* (122).

Although it has already been shown that it is not just scientists who might be concerned with the physicality of the photograph, but artists and critics working with the medium. Here he refers to the fact that our engagement with photographs through the screen becomes more physical through the gestures made to transport, adjust and engage with images of the world through the touch screen interface. The physicality of the photograph on/in screen can additionally be emphasised through the devices themselves used to engage with imagery. After all, smart phones and such technology are material things more so than the projected image or even the wall mounted screen, precisely because of their portability and palm/hand sized dimensions. Their graspable nature, along with a high optical resolution, means that holding one of these devices and looking at the image on its surface can be considered analogous to holding a printed photograph. The photographic on-screen, can be said to have an additional physicality, as images are often gesturally navigated and edited as well as taking on the physicality of the device through the glass screens they are

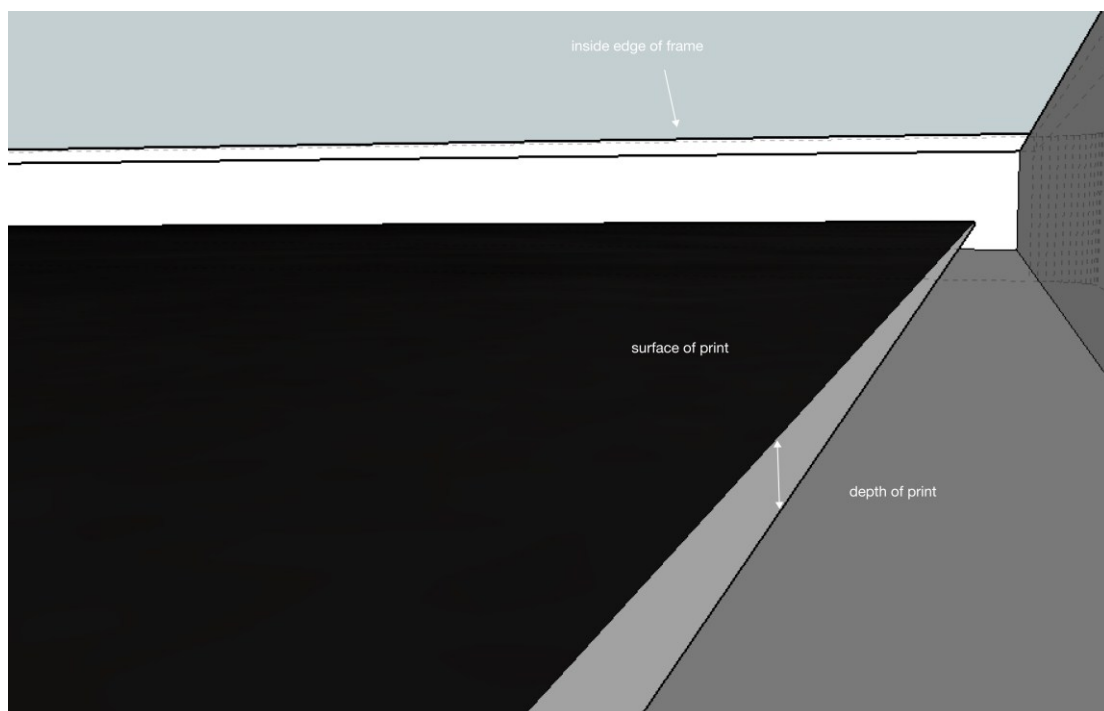
seemingly embedded within. But rather than simply suggesting that materiality becomes transposed and consequently transformed as it moves from print to screen – as has been discussed – the print, when it is the interlocutor between image and viewer becomes emphasised as dimensional object.

Whilst designing the frames for the print I have worked both with raw materials – wood, glue, nails, paint – but also with 3D modelling software. The combination has helped to realise the concept and consequent appearance of the frames, but also provides an illustration of how the engagement with digital, virtual space provides a re-evaluated awareness of the subtleties of the physical. Through using the modelling software I have been able to design a frame to millimetre precision and in doing this can also model the print itself to visualise how it might fit and look in the frame. This has involved measuring the dimensional depth of an actual print using a micrometer and transposing it to the modelled version.

Although this recounting might seem to function only as an anecdote it illustrates the technological irony of dealing with photographs in such a way; working previously in the darkroom, for myself at least has never involved measuring the thickness of a print so exactly.



Penny, David. *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals*. 2013. – Framing Illustration



Penny, David. *Fragments, Monoliths Portals*. 2013. – Framing Illustration

The framing of the work is intended to specifically locate the print visibly as an object in a box type frame. Each print is encased behind glass, which is treated with 'an ultra-thin coating (...) that suppresses the reflection of visible light. This coating renders Museum Glass nearly invisible to the eye,' (Tru-vue, no date:online). The aim from using this glazing product is to capitalise on the viewers desire to physically engage with the photographic object – through vision – whilst absolutely denying the possibility to do so, returning to Edwards, 'the fact that touch and gesture become so important in the unspoken relations with photographs can be linked back to the indexical quality of the photograph' (44). Denying physical, or potential physical access to the surface (whichever kind it may be) means denying the possibility to get closer to knowledge to that notion of photograph as index. As Ruth Finnegan describes,

[s]ymbolic tactile contact between humans through external artefacts is yet another way in which human beings extend their experience of the here and now into the longer ranges of the past (Finnegan, 2002:213-214).

Furthermore, the frames have been designed so the front face of the glass is located exactly flush within the wooden frame, that is, there is no wooden rebate around the edge of the glass, retaining the glass behind the wooden frame; as is usual with traditional framing procedures. The glass appears to float as an almost invisible surface above the print with no visible physical presence restricting its appearance. In order for this design to function, the glazing is built as an open case; a single sheet with four sides bonded its edges. This glass "tray" type object then fits inside the open frame as an interlocking clamshell mechanism, literally encasing the print.



For the viewer, being able to visible access the very edges of the glass surface presents the "tray" construction as a kind of vitrine enclosing the represented thing as thing itself.



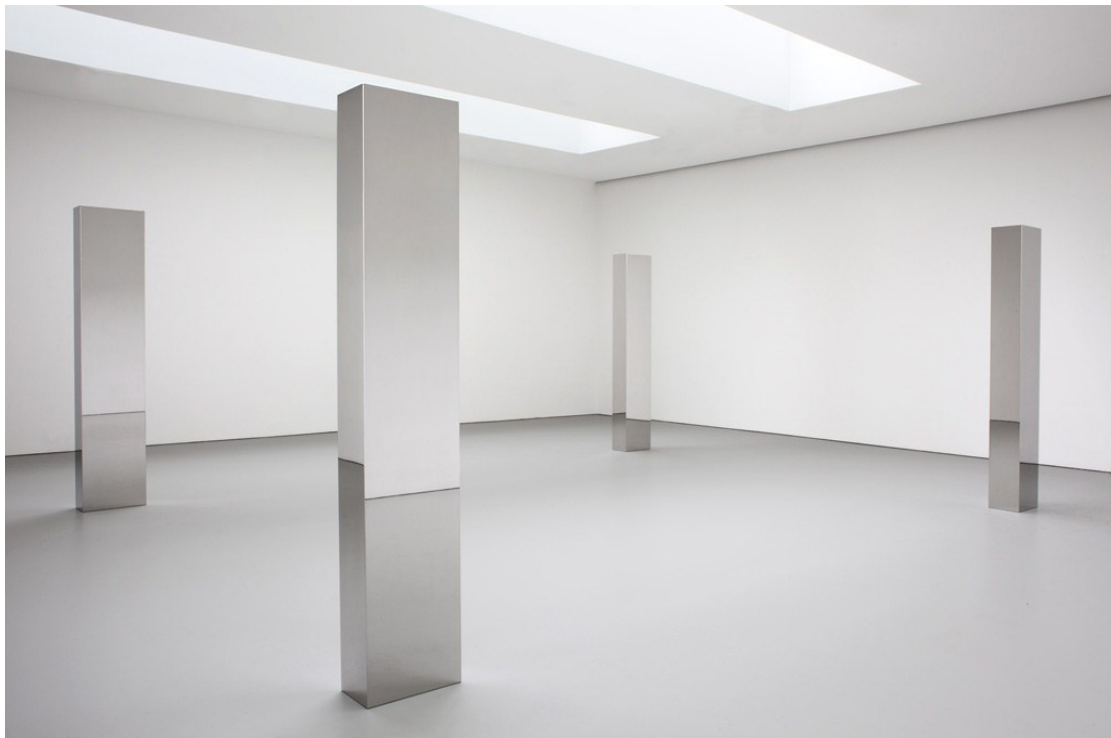
Penny, David. *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals*. 2013. – Framing Illustration



Penny, David. *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals*. 2013. – Framing Illustration

The design of these frames has been such that the wooden frame itself looks like a singular autonomous object. It is important that the finish to these devices appears seamless and the method of construction is visibly concealed. Wooden surfaces have been painted and heat-treated to achieve a continuous surface finish. The subtleties of these measures are designed in such a way to not be noticeable but to assist in increasing the potential agency of the photograph as a thing correspondingly engaging the viewer. The subtle, solidity and singularity of

the frame; the whole object being designed as a complete autonomous thing in itself, could be argued as tending towards a pseudo-sculptural position for this practice, the context of such having been discussed at the end of part one. There is an attempt at a flawlessness, a minimalist approach, in order to not disturb the engagement with the thing in and of the photograph, but also this fetishisation of finish as an attempt to exaggerate the literal objecthood of the work; boiling down the engagement with the work to the thing itself, might also resonate with the intentions of minimalist artists and their desire for the viewer to meet spatially with their objects.



McCracken, John. *Installation View of Stainless Steel Columns at the 2010 Solo Exhibition New Works in Bronze and Steel*. 2010, New York.

CONCLUSION

The trajectory of this research project throughout its duration, and the conclusions it has reached have been driven through my practice and a desire to rationalise my artistic processes and the work they have produced in a critical and academic context. I distinctly recall a moment at the beginning of the process, meeting my supervisory team and being asked how the practice would operate in this artistic research environment, what work I would be making and what this might look like. I replied that I was going to carry on doing what I would normally do when making photographs. Although this might have appeared a naive approach to academic research, I was adamant that it was important not to design or preconceive a body of work that could then be measured later against proposed hypotheses. Rather I would go to the "studio" (which was in fact my home) and follow an intuitive approach, which would allow the characteristics of my practice to take shape naturally as I engaged with the progressive design of a suitable question and aims that would embody and activate the knowledge ruminating in my individual approach to making art and the critical and practical contexts that aligned with that practice, and could be identified as the research

field. I brought to the project a personal history of practice of working with photography and objects as well as an interest in existing writing and thinking about the representation of objects more generally. *Pictures of Things...* seemed to be a simple and open-ended title with which to frame the project and begin the research investigation.

My initial investigations with practice were guided by this notion of "pictures of things". The statement set the loose parameters of how my practice could be described and I initially worked to explore making different types of photographs: some working in the home, some in the studio, I made images of objects with and without contextualising backgrounds, there were also many different types of objects: books, statues, collections of boxes, birdfeeders, plant pots, bread, cameras, broken light bulbs and piles of flour. I also constructed things, making sculptural arrangements to make new uncertain objects. Over time what became apparent was that whenever I made a photograph, the picture was not designed to try to describe what the object really was; what it might be called, what it might do – but rather it would try to create a photographic space which simultaneously revealed and concealed the object in the picture; offering

information to the viewer but at the same time shrouding information, making the object seem significant in some way that could not be comfortably determined. What was necessary was that I was using a "straight" photograph, one that appeared relatively un-mediating and transparent. The construction of concealment was produced through the selection of a particular object to be photographed and the relationship created between the space that pictorially surrounded it. This process would come to be defined as the intra-ordinary as has been discussed in the methodology accompanying this thesis. This ironic and provocative descriptor came initially through musing about the process I was using, rather than the appearance of the work that resulted, and was devised in parallel with a collection of photographs of rocks and similar objects, eventually collectively titled *Outside of the Walls*. At first, the intra-ordinary referred to the desire to make photographs of simple and everyday objects, which would not normally be considered important, or even considered at all, and the specific ability of the photographic process to both disguise or protect their lack of significance, whilst also imbuing them with a sense of significance. The intra-ordinary, as a specifically photographic conceptual notion, of being within the ordinary, also brought forward the relevance of surface to the project.

Photography as a means to look at the surface of ordinary things, engenders the ironic nature of the intra-ordinary and in turn the intra-ordinary acknowledges the built-in irony of photography, that of its constructed "naturalism". The ontological uncertainty of photography is considered in the literature review and these critical positions inform the work of different artists, working with the medium and in some way exploiting, investigating or challenging what has been identified as a paradox of the photograph to be persistent as documentary evidence, while, at the same time functioning as a catalyst for fantasy– identified as the research field to which this project aims to make a significant contribution.

As I continued with practice, making more pictures, a new series came out of the project. *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals* was again, not something predetermined to be the final body of work for the research project but was gradually developed, through previously unused images, that did not fit to the framework established in *Outside of the Walls* and new works made with a gradually developing aesthetic in mind. The final realisation of *Fragments, Monoliths, Portals* as a significant body of work for the project also marked the intra-ordinary as both a description of this aesthetic as well as a way to name the conceptualisation of my

working process. The intra-ordinary as an aesthetic category is the construction of a space of pictorial significance, it is a means to the generation of the imaginary from the photographic; the 'indiscernibility of the real and the unreal'. In this respect, the referent, which was the originally photographed object, carrying with it the narrative of its finding and the fantasy of transformation I project onto it, in preparation for its photograph, is symbolically sublimated in the appearance of the surface of the picture.

Fragments, Monoliths, Portals is put forward as the counterpart to this written thesis, although working practices throughout the project have functioned as the investigative research in the same way that literary and reflective research progressively developed the project. The final collection of works function as Jan Baetens suggests is appropriate.

Visual artists not only "think" but also their work often proposes illustrations of thought provoking devices whose structure and content have effects that can be compared to that of language...
[that is, as] real cognitive statements (Baetens, 2007:66-67).

The unknowable history of the picture and the object presented within that space has a particular subjective relationship with the viewer. As a development to the theory discussed in the literature review, the second part of the thesis introduced a theory of affect to consider an engagement with photographs, where the image has been intentionally produced to go beyond being a document of an event or scene. Rather the photograph is considered as being constructed to be actively "performative", implicating the viewer in an affective participation. The production of the photograph is proposed as one that knowingly incorporates a future engagement into the elements of its design to draw upon the viewer's interpretative position.

In addition this part of the thesis has argued that the pictures are to be considered as "pictures of things and things that are pictures", that is, they are images "of" things represented and they are also physical things themselves.

"Things" is considered as a specific term through the writings Bill Brown and W. J. T. Mitchell; a word that operates as the definition of a specifically, indefinite entity, whose character is that of indeterminability. Taking into account a recent

"material turn" the impact of digital culture on photography criticism has been considered as contributing to the debates around two interconnected conceptualisations of photography; its relationship to the real and its materiality. As a result, this research project and the final practical work it has produced makes a significant contribution to the academic field through the picture's specific "double thinghood". That is, the objects represented are things as a product of the construction of an aesthetic of the intra-ordinary; their subjective openness and affectively concerned design. As indeterminate objects, their thingness is iterated through the photograph's physical materiality and the framing designed to present this in a gallery context.

The oscillation, between the interpreted thing and the physical thing, is also effectively perceptually simultaneous. To think of an oscillation in terms of frequency, is to consider the movement back and forward between one state and another, on and off, in and out, rotation around a fixed point, the image and the object. The speed, at which this frequency occurs, might in some pictures be faster than others. In some work the frequency might be fast enough to not be perceptible.

The intention of the work is to draw out the viewers play between the photograph as image and artefact, a game that can be illustrated by the useful metaphor of a thaumatrope; an optical toy containing two image faces that flip continuously back and forth to appear as a singular image. These works through their aesthetic of the intra-ordinary are suggested as such. The movement between one state and another is the revealing of the images' transparency. The culturally constructed layer of transparency is a metaphysical film over the photograph, which can be stripped back revealing opacity and the picture as thing. This movement back and forth is perceptually still, motionless, as is the permanency of the objects in the pictures. Returning to my earlier thought identified in the methodology, about how to use photography to make pictures of ordinary things – the hunch that started the realisation of the intra-ordinary – to look at pictures where this oscillation is imperceptible, could be a means to look at ordinary things and overcome this problem of their potential extra-ordinariness through photographic agency. The intra-ordinary, embodied within these works, is this possibility to look beyond the surface to find what is significant, going beyond the photograph as document, investing the photograph with agency, recognising and declaring its physicality as a material thing and thus,

in addressing the question pertinent to this project – How might a practice of making “pictures of things” enhance our appreciation of the photograph as an object itself and together contribute to the critical understanding of the ontology of the photograph? – is considered as a significant contribution to knowledge.

What was initially and intuitively titled *Pictures of Things*, as a loose definition with which to explore and critically locate my practice of photographing objects has now become tight, as a specific aesthetic practice with unique characteristics and ontological relevance.

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